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A Study in Shelley Criticism

FRANCIS CLAIBORNE MASON

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A STUDY IN SHELLEY CRITICISM

An Examination of the Principal Interpretations of Shelley's Art and Philosophy in England from 1818 to 1860.

FRANCIS CLAIBORNE MASON

A Dissertation Presented to the Academic Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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A STUDY IN SHELLEY CRITICISM

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In attempting, as the present study does, to apply to the literature of criticism some of its own methods of analysis and appreciation, it is necessary at the very beginning to formulate certain premises about the nature both of the critical writings in question and of the poetry or prose with which those writings had to do. It will be the aim of this first chapter to satisfy these initial requirements, to define the scope and purpose of the work, and to indicate its attitude toward the criticism which is its primary subject matter and the poetry upon which all of its conclusions must necessarily have a significant bearing.

If, in the world of letters, poetry is the authentic and peculiar voice of genius at work in creating, criticism must be regarded as the distinctive literary medium of intellectual and aesthetic response to that which has been created. In form, quality, and spirit, it is almost as various as the arbiters of literature, and the readers, casual or studious, whose answering attitudes it has from time to time recorded. As a genus, it suffers almost no limitations of literary form; it has appeared as formal essay, rhymed dissertation upon poetic method, editorial note and commentary, desultory scholium, epistolary remark, and interpretative biography. And, furthermore, it has brought into play methods of comment and emotional and intellectual attitudes as numerous and varied as the forms in which these have found expression.

In the evaluation of critical literature, therefore, the form in which that literature appears may not fairly be adduced as evidence of high quality or the opposite, although it may be significant as an indication of literary ambition or of none, of serious or of casual approach, of public or of private expression. It seems to this writer, however, that a serious published essay or a lengthy review, formed and written as a public utterance, ought usually to carry greater weight than the private or semi-occult marginal annotation or the passing judgment written into an ordinary letter; this especially inasmuch as all literature, critical writings included, must suffer ultimate judgment by a larger audience than one or two.

If, therefore, criticism is here to be evaluated, in part, upon the basis of its value as literature, and if type or medium must be regarded as, at best, a doubtful index of merit, one consideration should always be a conscious part of the process. It is this. If we demand of the poet that his poem be a creative response to a genuine adventure of the spirit, we may expect of the critic that his criticism be an equally authentic, if less purely creative, record of his adventure in interpretation. Valuable analyses — and these are a part of the library of criticism — may be provided by a writer who, while keen of insight, is totally unsympathetic with the poet's mood or at utter variance with his aesthetic system; but it would seem that only when the critic has entered, fully though vicariously, into the experience of the poet, and set down an adequate expression, tempered by afterthought, of his response and its significance for other minds, does criticism reach its highest level and become itself a creative thing. The goal is a difficult one and seldom achieved; responsibility for the critic's reaching it must rest in part upon the poet.

A multitude of other forces, in nature more purely environmental, have qualified the critical output of every period. Issues of creed and party, national tempers, historical events and their social consequences, literary fads and fashions, schools of critical and philosophical thought, partisan publishers, sectional debate over matters of taste and aesthetic practice, and journalistic rivalry, all have entered in; and the effects of all these may be traced in the reviews and essays of the period in question, the early and middle nineteenth century in England. To these considerations must be added the fact that in the Romantic era in England criticism trailed behind the poets in understanding, and consequently in approving, the poetic temper of the times.*

Besides the value which some of the following criticisms of Shelley possess by reason of their own purely literary qualities (some of them are by men like Hazlitt and Macaulay), and in addition to their interest as Shelleyana, it is more than possible that they may contribute, by such rehearsals as this study provides, to the modern understanding of one of the most puzzling poets of the time. Modern research and appreciation have the advantages of perspective and the accumulation of fact and commentary; Shelley's contemporaries and their immediate successors had the closer view. They knew the spirit of the time in which he wrote and the constitution of his immediate public; they judged him by standards and from points of view which, if sometimes inadequate and partisan, may nevertheless serve through comparison for the improvement of our own. But most important, perhaps, is their significance in connection with this axiom — that no highly individualized poet, possessed of a message to his own as well as future times, and conscious of the social implications of his writings, can adequately be comprehended and judged without reference to his

* Shelley, for one, was conscious of the new era, while many of his critics were not. He wrote to Ollier in October, 1819, that certain of the poets of the day might, though unfairly, be said to have "imitated" each other, since they had derived "from the new springs of thought and feeling, which the great events of our age have exposed to view, a similar tone of sentiment, imagery, and expression." See **Shelley Memorials**, edited by Lady Shelley, London, Smith, Elder, 1859, p. 121.

impact upon the collective contemporary mind. As we shall set forth below, Shelley was such a poet. He aimed at more than the mere aesthetic recognition of the technical and artistic merits of his work, and, in the present day, when his gospel of regeneration has lost through time and change a part of its force, we must look at him in terms of contemporary as well as of immortal achievement, if we are to judge of his work "with the same spirit that its author writ."

Criticism has been broadly defined as "the intelligent appreciation of any work of art, and by consequence the just estimate of its value and rank."* At one extreme it may include the mere discussion of a single work, isolated from all explicit reference to underlying literary principle; at the other, it may seek to discover and formulate the permanent principles of literary creation by the application of inductive methods to acknowledged masterpieces of the writer's art. In either of these cases, simply considered, the critic's function is reduced to a science; and yet we know that nowhere has great, enduring, creative criticism been produced by methods, however valid, which were purely scientific. The words "appreciation" and "taste," so often employed in connection with critical literature, imply that emotion, personal response, the reception of more than the mere materials of intellectual judgment, have made the greatest critics what they were and are. In the criticism of poetry, at least, no mind which has remained impervious to effects of sympathy, hope, fear, exultation, the universal responses of the heart which it is the preeminent purpose of the poet to arouse, or who has failed to make of these a memorable record, can claim the highest honors of the calling. The "tuning fork" method of Matthew Arnold is in itself an acknowledgment of the inadequacy of logical processes alone to achieve a fitting commentary upon great poetry. The best criticism can never be simply a science, inasmuch as it must deal with effects upon the critic which transcend the intellect.

But this is the Parnassus of poetic appreciation, and few immortals will be found among the early commentators upon Shelley. Much of the critical material here to be considered must be excerpted from books that did not profess to seek a systematic exegesis — which were, indeed, in many instances, not mainly critical in purpose. Perhaps the greatest part has been found in periodical essays and reviews. These writings frequently failed, as we shall observe, to express that rich participation in the poet's experience which we have set as the highest goal; and we must therefore the more carefully consider those lesser achievements which are a valid part of the critic's aim.

These include the introduction to the reading public of new compositions, accomplished by expository methods, quotation, and the like, so employed as to secure for the work the attitude and reception which it merits; the judgment of the book, where moral ends have been professed by the writer, upon valid moral grounds; the clarification of poetic principles by the comparison of one work with another, where comparison is legitimate and profitable; the conveying of information, biographical or historical, when such matter is relevant to interpretation; the use of a book or poem as a text, when the composition is well suited to the purpose, for a discussion of abstract artistic truth; and the use of a poet or his poetry as the subject of writings which profess the independent purposes of the personal or formal essay.

Admitting, then, both scientific and artistic elements as proper to the literature of appreciation, and having in mind both the minor practical ends which it may serve and the possibility of its rising to high creative levels, the present study proposes to investigate the principal criticisms of Shelley's poetry and philosophy which were published in England during the half-century immediately following the appearance of his earliest significant work. It is no part of this purpose to compile an exhaustive library of Shelley allusion, or to study the public aspects of the growth of his reputation, personal or literary, or to include any part of the voluminous library which has grown up about him which is not in some degree critical, rather than merely biographical. Criticisms will be considered important if they were the utterances of important literary men, if they appeared in prominent literary periodicals, if they were the expressions of persons qualified to speak with peculiar authority by reason of their connections with the poet, or if they possess peculiar interest for any reason other than these. And, inasmuch as contemporary judgments upon Shelley's works may conceivably assist the modern understanding of his meaning as a poet of his times, widely varying attitudes in the literature of his period will be subject to especial observation.

The specific ends toward which the investigation will be directed should here be stated quite definitely, the preceding qualifications having been established.

First, it is proposed to assemble, by the use of summary and adequate quotation, the most interesting and representative interpretations of the poet and his peculiar achievement. No small part of the worth of the study should consist in its making available the gist and the best passages of a body of critical writing which, in spite of its interest and occasional merit, has remained buried in books and journals which are rare, obscure, or difficult of access. This material will be presented in such quantity as to provide within this study such sources as will serve the reader, if the occasion arises, in the correction of any errors of interpretation into which the present writer may fall.

In the second place, specific opinions upon individual poems will be recorded, for their own interest as well as for the differences of critical position which they may indicate, and for their bearing upon more modern judgments.

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* **Some Principles of Literary Criticism,** by C. T. Winchester, New York, 1899, p. 1.

Thirdly, this critical literature, as has been already suggested, will be evaluated in terms of its own literary worth, in accordance with the conception of the critic's office already set forth.

Next, it is hoped that some light may be thrown upon the critical standards and premises employed by the writers under discussion. At least, specific critical methods will be pointed out and evaluated.

Finally, and most important, it is proposed to trace the development of what may be called "Shelley-intelligence," as distinguished from the mere rank and reputation which he was increasingly accorded, and, incidentally, to clarify certain modern conceptions of the meaning of his work as literature of reform and uplift.

Subsequent references to Shelley's poems and ways of thought render it necessary to include here a summarized critique of his dominant qualities and their relationship to his most important compositions. Since his poetry is not the primary subject of this investigation, it will obviously be impracticable to include anything like a complete analytical discussion, or always to establish the positions here affirmed upon the basis of authority or documented fact. A brief statement of attitude upon a few of the principal controversial points of Shelley criticism must suffice; the views of the writer are, in general, similar to those of a few of the best modern critical discussions, and to these reference will be made. The element of individual opinion must necessarily also be involved in such a statement. The final appeal is to the whole of Shelley's poetry, his letters, political pamphlets, essays upon philosophy and poetic art, and the best of modern thought upon the subject.

The cardinal point of this position is that nearly all of Shelley's principal poems, and many of the lyrics, were consciously written to express and propagate his passion for human betterment. He was, in the broadest sense of the word, a didactic poet, though he disowned the purpose of conveying in his poetry direct moral instruction of a simply intellectual kind.* Some of the earlier poems were direct attacks upon social abuse, and offered astonishing and quixotic remedies.† Later works, embodying his favorite idea of man's perfectibility, have seemed to many readers to shadow forth impracticable and often incomprehensible Utopias upon earth.‡ That Shelley came to regard poetry as an instrument of moral and spiritual uplift, rather than as a medium for the conveyance of practical remedial plans and instructions, is sufficiently evident from the reading of **A Defence of Poetry.** A few quotations from that last and most perfect formulation of his philosophy of poetry will serve to indicate that he regarded poetry as, in a sense, an intensely practical thing, that he turned from direct propagation of reform to a higher didacticism of the imagination, and that his dreams ought not to be subjected, in the interpretation, to the more than questionable test of literal feasibility.**

Shelley's famous remark about poets as legislators received, in **A Defence of Poetry,** the following emphasis:

> [Poets] are the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion.††

The thoughtless demand, made by some readers, for a workable system of earthly renovation, if not sufficiently refuted by a sympathetic reading of the poems, may be confronted with the following passage:

> Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events: . . . A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not.‡‡

One modern writer remarks that "there was a gulf between his dreams and reality that he could only traverse by an arbitrary leap of his imagination."*** The proper comment upon this is that, according to Shelley's quite valid philosophy, imagination was the only vehicle in which the gulf **should** be traversed. In any case, we see that the absence from such poems as **Prometheus** or **The Revolt of Islam** of any **convincing** means by which the millennium is to be reached constitutes an element rather than a

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* The modern interpretation with which the writer most nearly agrees, and in his opinion the best short study of the subject, is A. C. Bradley's "Shelley's View of Poetry," in his **Oxford Lectures on Poetry,** London, Macmillian, 1909.

† For a characterization of some of the weaknesses of Shelley's early iconoclastic position, see J. A. Symonds' **Shelley,** English Men of Letters, revised edition, London, 1887, pp. 40 and 183.

‡ For a comment upon the bearing of some of the lyrics upon this social motif, see Stopford A. Brooke's **Studies in Poetry,** London, Duckworth, 1907.

** See Mrs. O. W. Campbell's **Shelley and the Unromantics,** London, Methuen, 1924, p. 287 and the including chapter, for excellent modern substantiation of this position.

†† **A Defence of Poetry,** in the Percy Reprints, No. 3, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, New York, 1921, p. 26.

‡‡ Ibid. p. 27.

*** A. Clutton-Brock, in **Shelley: the Man and the Poet,** London, Methuen, 1910, p. 287.

hiatus in his poetic method; and we perceive the utter fallacy of condemning his poetry because its author did not achieve a pragmatical philosophy instead of a poem.

In the same essay Shelley wrote:

> A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connexion than time, place, circumstance, cause, and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur; the other is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature.*

The method, then, by which poetry may justly be thought to do man good is of another sort, and may be described briefly by two final extracts from the **Defence:**

> The functions of the poetical faculty are twofold; by one it creates new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order, which may be called the beautiful and the good.†

> The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. . . . A poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither.‡

In proportion as Shelley, in his later efforts, attained to the high level of bardic inspiration of which he wrote in this essay, he may be thought to have practised the tenets of the philosophy which it expressed. Certain it is that he took the poet's calling seriously and had faith in its effective ministry to the aspiring spirit of the race; he had, as Mrs. Shelley later wrote, "no care for any of his poems that did not emanate from the depths of his mind, and develop some high or abstruse truth."**

To this "passion for reforming mankind," refined in his later manhood to a semi-occult philosophy of imaginative evangelism, most of Shelley's more ambitious works may be related. **Queen Mab,** of course, voiced an immediate rebellion, and suggested, if not that bloodshed which Shelley so abhorred, an analogous violence to social institutions. **Alastor** — the preface as well as the poem — premised a spiritual sympathy of man with man as an essential element in the complete and satisfying life of the spirit. **The Revolt of Islam** sought to inspire its readers toward a social millennium, being offered as

> an experiment on the temper of the public mind as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live.††

Rosalind and Helen, although Shelley disavowed any serious purpose in writing it, has this connection with the works of social intent, that it represents its characters as subjected to misfortunes which arise, in part, out of the hampering conventions of morality and group restriction. **Julian and Maddalo,** though in a similar sense an objective work, offered Shelley the opportunity of discussing, through the character which represents himself, certain problems of good and evil, of courage and faith, inspired by the sight of the madman. **Prometheus Unbound,** an allegory, in its general sense, of human aspiration, was accompanied by the following record of Shelley's intentions, which excluded the narrowly didactic:

> My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that, until the mind can love, and admire, and trust and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness. Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appear to me to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take AEschylus rather than Plato as my model.‡‡

The Cenci, similar in a certain objectivity to **Rosalind and Helen** and to **Julian**

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* **A Defence,** p. 30.
† Ibid., p. 52.
‡ Ibid., pp. 33-34.
** Her edition of the **Works,** London, Moxon, 1847, p. 229.
†† Shelley's **Preface, Complete Poems,** Cambridge edition, p. 45.
‡‡ Shelley's **Preface,** Cambridge edition, p. 164.

and Maddalo, and free from their autobiographical elements, is a thing apart from Shelley's more characteristic works, by reason of its realism. But even in this work Shelley had been attracted to the subject by the spectacle which it presented of human suffering, and was conscious, in giving it to the public, of the high moral ends served by great tragedy. He wrote in his preface, again disavowing the thing "vulgarly called a moral purpose,"

> The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind.*

The Mask of Anarchy and **Oedipus Tyrannus** were direct rebukes to tyranny in England; **Peter Bell the Third** reproached a great poet with reactionary weakness; **Adonais,** if chiefly personal, at least attacked the hierarchy of reviewers; **Hellas** was a hymn of triumph for that Grecian liberty which Shelley had persuaded himself would be accomplished in the end; and the **Epipsychidion,** if the most intimate and esoteric of his works, will reveal to the understanding reader an adventure in the quest after that spiritual affection which its author believed would be the cornerstone of the New Age. The **Odes** to Liberty and Naples speak for themselves; and the famous **Ode to the West Wind** is the unmistakable prayer of the prophet of uplift for the gift of a voice of cosmic penetration:

> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
> And, by the incantation of this verse,
>
> Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
> Ashes and sparks, my works among mankind!
> Be through my lips to unawakened earth
>
> The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
> If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?†

Thus it was that the didactic bent of Shelley's genius found its most distinctive utterance in terms of some phase of the theme of human amelioration. His most characteristic work, if not his intrinsically finest, is to be found in the poems of benevolent spiritual influence inspired by the vision of ultimate social perfection upon earth.

Of course, all of Shelley's reformatory writings are not to be judged as alike in conscious intention. We may divide his writings of that sort, poetry and prose, into three classes. Highest and best, with respect to their author as poet, are the poems which, through the purification of man's imagination, were intended to strengthen his moral being. Next are those poems which, with a poet's passion, condemned the tyrannies of church and state and social order. And last are his political pamphlets, Irish and English, in which he offered with the logical equilibrium of sound political thought a few valid improvements upon the governmental organization. From these last, of course, he expected no millennial results. But all three classes of composition had for their moving energy his philanthropic fire.

This brings us to another premise in the establishment of our position on controversial points in the interpretation of Shelley. If he is to be judged as a thinker and not merely as a singer, the permanent validity of his social prophecies, as evident to the modern mind, must be considered in our attempt to understand the adverse attitude toward his prophecies of his contemporaries, who had to evaluate the thinker without the assistance of temporal perspective. The newer estimate, as summarized by a modern philosopher, is that all of Shelley's reformatory principles were correct to this extent, that they have come more and more into practice with the passage of time and the progress of social philosophy.

> According to this newer estimate, Shelley was the poet-pioneer of a great republican and humanitarian movement which we now see to be impending; he intuitively anticipated, in his own character and aspirations, many of the revolutionary ideas which are already in process of development. We do not assert that he was personally a faultless being . . . but we do say that his outlook, so far from being that of a weakminded visionary, was, in the main, an exceptionally shrewd and prophetic one, inasmuch as all the chief principles which were essential to his creed are found to have increased enormously in importance during the seventy years that have elapsed since his death.‡

Thus, Shelley's disbelief in the "personal" God conception is now, for right or wrong,

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* Cambridge edition, p. 210.

† For a similar interpretation, and for an excellent study of Shelley's conception of his art, see Melvin T. Solve's **Shelley: His Theory of Poetry,** Chicago, 1927. Shelley's didactic qualities are here discussed at length.

‡ Henry S. Salt's **Percy Bysshe Shelley, Poet and Pioneer.** London and New York, Scribner's, 1896, p. 6.

commonly held; his general principles regarding labor and female emancipation are in practice; his perfectibility is the present scientific doctrine of evolutionary betterment; and his doctrines of spiritual love, self-reform, and humanitarian charity are among the best of modern social ideals.*

> He intuitively grasped and assimilated those democratic conceptions which were destined to survive the violence of tyrannical oppression and the slower but more searching ordeal of time; and if his ethical creed be compared with that of the other poets and thinkers of his age, in the light of the history of the past half-century, it is not Shelley who will be found deficient in sagacity and foresight.†

It has often been said that Shelley had little grasp upon matters of ordinary terrestrial life, that he could not comprehend practical problems and their prosaic solutions, and even that he was lacking in the intellectual power to grapple with reality. These allegations are decidedly not true. They have apparently arisen from the observation of certain unreal and abstract qualities in his poems; and these qualities we have accounted for, except for that part of them which arose from the innate abstraction of Shelley's peculiar mind, as results of his poetic theory. Certain idiosyncrasies of his rebellious character may also have evoked the opinion that he was not fitted to live in a problematic world of physical and social restriction. It is true that he recoiled from the spectacle of human misery and error, and took refuge in a spirit-world of his own creation.‡ But to these charges in general we oppose the fact that he managed business affairs with somewhat more skill than the poet is conventionally reputed to possess; that he was forever caring for the needs, spiritual and material, of a congregation of semi-dependents, ranging from William Godwin and Leigh Hunt to Claire Clairmont; that he showed much common sense in his letters to his publishers about the public appeal of his various poems; that in spite of his meditative propensity he knew more of the workings of human nature than books could have taught him.** But much more significant even than these facts, in answering the criticisms in question, is Shelley's unmistakable talent as a political philosopher, revealed in the English and Irish pamphlets.†† If the poems offer no concrete methods of securing social betterment, we have seen the reason for it; and we need not accuse Shelley of being all rhapsody and emotion as long as these documents of another sort survive. The remedies for the Irish situation offered in his "Proposals for an Association," and the canny qualifications added to his remarks on Parliament and the institution of Universal Suffrage in his "Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote," give unquestionable evidence of his grasp upon the problems of governmental machinery and of his awareness that human institutions must be dealt with in a guarded, patient, and thoughtful manner.‡‡

Of his so-called atheism, we need only say that it was not atheism at all, but merely rebellion against the abuses of faith and creed which organized religion seemed to him chiefly to represent. He was, of course, not a Christian in the accepted sense; but he came increasingly into harmony with the spirit of Christ, and had a profound sense of the divinity beyond the natural world.***

The progress of his philosophical ideas, from the materialism and the Godwinian necessitarianism of the **Queen Mab** days, through the Platonic creed of "ideas," to a sort of transcendental pantheism, is sufficiently familiar to his thoughtful readers.†††

Questions of the moral offensiveness of Shelley's works must ultimately be left for judgment with the temper of the period in which the judgment is pronounced. The element of incest, removed from **Laon and Cythna** when it became **The Revolt of Islam,** recurred in **The Cenci.** It is beside the question to cavil at his choice of a subject which happened to involve it; he was not led to the selection by merely morbid interest in the crime itself; and he thought that he had treated it with the greatest delicacy.‡‡‡ Many of Shelley's early critics thought that he had not; but the modern verdict is likely to go against them. In the light of the tremendous tragic force of the play and its high rank as tragic poetry, it should at least be accorded

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* See Salt, Chapter IX.

† Ibid., p. 22.

‡ See Mrs. Shelley's note on **The Witch of Atlas** in her edition of the works, London, Moxon, 1847.

** Note especially his last letters to Hunt, in the **Letters,** edited by Roger Ingpen, New York, Scribner's, 1909. Vol. II.

†† For a convenient reprint of these pamphlets, see **Shelley's Early Life,** by Denis Florence Mac-Carthy, London, Hotten, 1872.

‡‡ For a discussion of Shelley's political ideas, see Ch. IV of Brinton's **The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists,** Oxford University Press, 1926.

*** See his notes to **Hellas,** Cambridge edition, p. 319, where "Christianity" makes one in a series with "domestic happiness" and "civilization." See also Peck's **Shelley: His Life and Work,** Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, Vol. II, pp. 245-247.

††† For discussion of Shelley's changing philosophies, see Mrs. Campbell's **Shelley and the Unromantics,** and the Introduction by John Shawcross to **Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism,** London, Frowde, 1909.

‡‡‡ See the Preface to **The Cenci.**

the tolerance which is given without quibble to the **Oedipus** of old, and allowed to stand upon its other merits.

So far as the records go—and biographers have been especially diligent in his case—Shelley's character stands almost unimpeached for moral blemish.

Commentators of the mid-century, as we shall see, were accustomed to look back upon Shelley's time as a troublous period in old England's history. So it was, in comparison with their own. The reaction from the excesses of the French Revolution had left Englishmen in a highly nervous state. Formerly liberal men had become reactionaries. The Irish situation was, as usual, a bone of contention. A moneyed aristocracy had grown up, and laborers groaned under industrial oppressions. The national debt bore heavily upon the poor. Hospitals presented revolting scenes of suffering. The Regent, reviled by Hunt in **The Examiner** as a "fat Adonais," offered to the English people an example, far from edifying, of the abuse of place and privilege. Liberty of the press and of speech was borne down under law-suits, imprisonments, and fines. Queen Caroline was indicted. Government spies stirred up insurrection, that it might be punished. Religious bigotry joined cause with the government in suppressing the utterance of unorthodox thought. And rumble of revolutions in southern Europe added to unrest the vision of a more perfect civic liberty.

Into this hectic period came Shelley, possessing unusual propensities for disturbing the minds of men, already troubled by turmoil in the social constitution; and it is significant for the study of the criticisms with which he was received that it **was** such a time as this, when any attack upon the pillars of church, state, or society would seem most perilous and most to be condemned.

It is not strange, however, that the older generation of poets, and important men of letters generally, should have left little comment upon the new poet. The literary journals were there to give judgment if he should seem to deserve their critical attention. Nevertheless, what statements these established authors have given us are of unusual interest because of the men who spoke or wrote them, and to these may be added other later comments by men of note, in introduction to the examination of the more elaborate critiques of the press, soon to be studied.

These briefly expressed opinions are frequently unfavorable, and, when we consider the attitudes of Hazlitt, Macaulay, and Kingsley, reveal many of the principal literary men of the period as against Shelley, or less than half-heartedly in his favor. None of the criticisms given here, however, bear the marks of studied interpretation, and none, except for the eminence of their authors, are as weighty in the balance as the later and lengthier reviews.

Byron was the poet of greatest note with whom Shelley had close acquaintance. His critical remarks, however, are erratic and perhaps unreliable.* A few of his remarks on the subject were expressed in his letters or recorded from his conversation by Medwin. These are, at least in part, favorable.

> There's Shelley has more poetry in him than any man living; and if he were not so mystical, and would not write Utopias and set himself up as a Reformer, his right to rank as a poet, and very highly too, could not fail of being acknowledged . . . The works he wrote at seventeen are much more extraordinary than Chatterton's at the same age.†

To Shelley himself he wrote on April 26, 1821:

> You also know my high opinion of your own poetry, — because it is of **no** school. I read Cenci — but, besides that I think the **subject** essentially undramatic, I am not an admirer of our old dramatics, **as models.** I deny that the English have hitherto had a drama at all. Your Cenci, however, was a work of power, and poetry.‡

Between Byron's recognized whimsicality and Medwin's known habit of inaccuracy, these may each be taken **cum grano salis.****

Thomas Moore also thought Shelley's talent greater than his achievement:

> Though never personally acquainted with Mr. Shelley, I can join freely with those who most loved him in admiring the various excellencies of his heart and genius, and lamenting the too early doom that robbed us of the mature fruits of both. His short life has been, like his poetry, a sort of bright erroneous dream, — false in the general principles on which it pro-

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* "We do not know what were Byron's real opinions of Shelley's poetry. He said different things of it at different times and to different people."—Clutton-Brock, **Shelley the Man and the Poet,** p. 250. See also Saintsbury's annihilation of Byron as a critic: **A History of Criticism,** Vol. III, p. 110.

† Medwin's **Conversations of Lord Byron.** New Edition, Coburn, London, 1825. Vol. II, pp. 84-85.

‡ Thomas Moore's **Life of Lord Byron,** Philadelphia, 1857. Vol. II, pp. 273-4.

** For a few other items from Byron, principally in defense of Shelley's character after his death, and for a somewhat more optimistic estimate of his critical worth, see Clement Tyson Goode's **Byron As Critic,** Weimar, 1923, — a Cornell thesis. See also Miss Elizabeth Glass Marshall's **Poetical Theories and Criticisms of the Chief Romantic Poets,** a dissertation of the University of Virginia, 1925.

ceeded, though beautiful and attaching in most of the details. Had full time been allowed for the "overlight" of his imagination to have been tempered down by the judgment which, in him, was still in reserve, the world at large would have been taught to pay that high homage to his genius which those only who saw what he was capable of can now be expected to accord to it.*

Keats had for him only the well-known comment in his letter to Shelley, that the latter should "curb his magnaminity" and "be more of an artist," and "load every rift with ore." It was probably his meaning that Shelley's poetry was too nearly didactic, and lacked concrete imagery and beauty.†

Wordsworth, established and reactionary genius, almost completely neglected Shelley. Much of his critical prose, as is well known, had to do with the exposition of his own poetic theories. The individual poets chiefly discussed were Dryden, Milton, the Elizabethans, and those of the eighteenth century who were most nearly "romantic." When he mentioned his contemporaries, they were usually the older ones, or the more famous ones, whose positions would suggest passing comment in intelligent literary discourse: Moore, Scott, Byron. Although he recommended that poems of Helen Maria Williams and Charlotte Smith be included in a proposed anthology of the sonnet, of Shelley there was only the following—high praise, indeed—spoken in "conversation with his nephew and biographer":

> Shelley is one of the best **artists** of us all: I mean in workmanship of style.‡

This from a specialist in artistic technique was no small praise, even if followed by silence.

An explanation of Wordsworth's attitude has been offered by a modern student of the subject, and is convincing:

> To Wordsworth, Shelley, like Byron, was a moral suspect, a teacher of dangerous doctrines, made all the more seductively dangerous by the fineness of the art by which they were conveyed.**

Southey, upon meeting Shelley at Keswick, saw in the young and ardent poet a replica of his youthful self, and offered to become his guide and instructor in matters of study. He wrote of Shelley at that time:

> Here is a man at Keswick, who acts upon me as my own ghost would do . . . At present he has got to the Pantheistic stage of philosophy, and, in the course of a week, I expect he will be a Berkeleyan, for I have put him upon a course of Berkeley. It has surprised him a good deal to meet, for the first time in his life, with a man who perfectly understands him, and does him full justice.††

But when Shelley's views had become more dangerous in practice than the consequences to be expected from a country course in philosophy, Southey was driven to denounce him and all his opinions. Twelve years later, after Shelley had "taxed" him with having written certain hostile reviews, he published in **Blackwood's Magazine** a letter which read in part as follows:

> Mr. Shelley having, in the letter alluded to, thought proper to make some remarks, upon my opinions, I took occasion, in reply, to comment upon his, and to ask him, (as the tree is known by its fruits,) whether he had found them conducive to his own happiness, and the happiness of those with whom he had been most nearly connected. This produced a second letter from him, written in a tone, partly of justification, partly of attack. I replied to this also . . . by recapitulating to him, as a practical illustration of his principles, the leading circumstances of his own life . . . .
> It is all that ever passed between us, except a note from Shelley, some years before, accompanying a copy of his **Alastor,** and one of mine in acknowledgment of it.‡‡

Coleridge, in an undated letter quoted by Hogg in his biography,*** regretted that

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* Moore's **Life of Lord Byron,** Philadelphia, 1857. Vol. II, pp. 387-388.
† **Complete Poetical Works and Letters,** Cambridge ed., p. 443.
‡ **Wordsworth' Literary Criticism,** edited by Nowell C. Smith, London, Frowde, 1905, p. 259.
** David Watson Rannie: **Wordsworth and His Circle,** New York and London, Methuen, 1907, p. 262.
†† **Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey,** edited by his son, C. C. Southey, New York, n. d., p. 280. The letter was dated January 4, 1812.
‡‡ Vol. XVI, Dec. 1824, pp. 712-715.
*** **The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** London, Moxon, 1858. Vol. II, p. 44-45.

Shelley had fallen into Southey's hands, and expressed a sympathetic attitude toward his philosophical vagaries:

> I think as highly of Shelley's genius — yea, and of his **heart** — as you can do, . . . I **might** have been of use to him, and Southey could not; for I should have sympathised with his poetics, metaphysical reveries, and the very word metaphysics is an abomination to Southey, and Shelley would have felt that I understood him. His discussions — tending toward Atheism of a certain sort — would not have scared **me**; for **me** it would have been a semi-transparent Larva, soon to be sloughed, and through which I should have seen the true **image,** — the final metamorphosis. Besides, I have ever thought that sort of Atheism the next best religion to Christianity; nor does the better faith I have learnt from Paul and John interfere with the cordial reverence I feel for Benedict Spinoza.*

Sir Walter Scott recognized Shelley's talent, but showed no enthusiasm. In a letter to Shelley he made a kindly criticism of the younger poet's errors of wordiness, excessively minute description, and lack of perspective. The letter was written in a tone of fatherly advice, and, if it specified no quarrel with Shelley's ideas, indicated likewise no impression of his startling genius.†

Walter Savage Landor, prejudiced at first against Shelley by reason of certain stories he had heard about him, later revised his view and paid tribute to his verse.

> Whenever he spoke of Shelley afterwards, he would praise him both for his virtues and for his writings, and as one who united the ardours of the poet with the patience and virtue of the philosopher. "Shelley," he said, "may have had less vigour than Byron and less command of language than Keats;" but he himself would rather have written his —
>
> Music, when soft voices die,
> Vibrates in the memory,
>
> than all the lyrics of the Elizabethans, Shakespeare's only excepted. Elsewhere he says that Shelley and Keats were inspired with a stronger spirit of poetry than any other writer since Milton, Robert Burns only excepted.‡

Landor is reputed also to have thought Shelley the greatest prose master of the age.**

These were the informally expressed opinions of the chief poets of the time. To them may be added other more or less casual judgments, some of contemporary and some of later date, to complete this impressionistic preliminary view.

Thomas Lovell Beddoes, who with T. F. Kelsall and "Barry Cornwall" was responsible for the publication of Shelley's **Posthumous Poems** (1824), referred with admiration to Shelley's poetry in his correspondence with those gentlemen.†† In August 1824 (Letter VIII) he wrote:

> The disappearance of Shelley from the world, seems, like the tropical setting of that luminary (**aside** I hate the word) to which his poetical genius can alone be compared with reference to the companions of his day, to have been followed by instant darkness and owl-season; whether the vociferous Darley is to be the comet, or tender full-faced L. E. L. the milk-and-watery moon of our darkness, are questions for the astrologers.‡‡

On March 25, 1825, he exclaimed to Kelsall (Letter XIII):

> We ought too to look back with late repentance & remorse on our intoxicated praise, now cooling, of Lord Byron — such a man so spoken of when the world possessed Goethe, Schiller, Shelley!

In the same year, while in Germany, he wrote Kelsall twice for a **Prometheus**

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* I do not find this letter among those written by Coleridge after 1811 and printed in **Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,** edited by E. Hartley Coleridge, Boston and New York (Houghton, Mifflin) 1895, Vol. II. It is, however, quoted in Mrs. Campbell's **Shelley and the Unromantics,** p. 103.

† The letter is given in the **Diary of Lady Frances Shelley,** edited by Richard Edgcumbe, London, Murray, 1913. Vol. II, pp. 49-51. The letter is undated; the diary at this point is of the year 1819.

‡ **Letters and Other Unpublished Writings of Walter Savage Landor,** edited by Stephen Wheeler, London, 1897, pp. 172-174.

** See the **British and Foreign Review,** volume for 1840.

†† **The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes,** edited with Notes by Edmund Gosse. London and New York, Macmillan, 1894.

‡‡ Letitia Elizabeth Landon, a once popular poet; see Medwins' **Life of Shelley,** 1913, Oxford, pp. 127 and 319.

Unbound and once for "a Cenci"; and in April, 1826, he expressed the result of his comparison of the two works with each other and with his own.

> You're right the Cenci is best, because truest . . . Why did you send me the Cenci? I open my own page & see what damned trash it all is. No truth or feeling. How the deuce do you, a third & disinterested person, manage to tolerate it?

The comparison was probably with Beddoes' own **The Bride's Tragedy,** which he had asked to have sent with the **Prometheus.** He was beginning to think that his own small talent should have preferred "Apollo's pill-box to his lyre."

In April of 1829 he was still holding to the same opinion of the relative merit of his and Shelley's writings:

> Read only an act of Shakespeare, a bit of Mliton, a scene or two of the admirably true Cenci, something of Webster, Marston, Marlowe or in fact anything deeply, naturally, sociably felt and then take to these Jestbooks— you will feel at once how forced, artificial, insipid, &c., &c., all such things are. To keep me up, you must be a daily reader of Walker, Steele and the Lit. Gaz. Parnassians.

This was high praise, but perhaps to be expected from Beddoes. He has been mentioned among those upon whom the influence of Shelley seemed to have a pernicious effect.* But it was a sane, spritely, and high-spirited Beddoes who wrote these letters, and one whose admiration of Shelley seems untouched by anything like morbid jealousy.

Thomas Noon Talfourd was apparently an enthusiastic admirer of at least one of Shelley's major poems. A letter of his to James Ollier reveals that a review in which he had expressed high praise of **Prometheus Unbound** was refused by an editor, Mr. Colburn, because he had been advised that the poem was Jacobinical and blasphemous.†

While Horace Smith, Shelley's faithful friend, and author with his brother of the **Rejected Addresses,** likewise held a high opinion of **Prometheus,** he preferred **The Cenci,** as Beddoes had done, and for the same reason.

> I got from Ollier last week a copy of the **Prometheus Unbound,** which is certainly a most original, grand, and occasionally sublime work, evincing in my opinion a higher order of talent than any of your previous productions; and yet, contrary to your own estimation, I must say I prefer the **Cenci,** because it contains a deep and sustained human interest, of which we feel a want in the other. Prometheus himself certainly touches us nearly; but we see very little of him after his liberation; and, though I have no doubt it will be more admired than anything you have written, I question whether it will be so much read as the **Cenci.**‡

William Godwin, while full of advice for Shelley the philosopher, had apparently little time for Shelley the poet. Maria Gisborne wrote of him in her journal:

> He has not seen the Prometheus, and does not think he shall read it, for he hates to read books that are full of obscurities and puzzles.**

Though eloquent of public interest at the time, and in a measure indicative of personal opinion, the memorial verses of John Chalk Claris, better known as "Arthur Brooke,"†† who had a high regard for Shelley's merits, and those of the Quaker poet, Bernard Barton, who lamented the young rebel's misguided career,‡‡ are hardly to be taken as critical utterances. Of Barton's poem Charles Lamb wrote to him that it would hardly "convert the club at Pisa," adding:

> Something like a parody on the song of Ariel would please them better:—
>
> 'Full fathom five the Atheist lies,
> Of his bones are hell-dice made.'***

In August, 1824, Lamb also wrote to Barton:

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* See Mrs. Campbell's **Shelley and the Unromantics,** p. 8.

† The letter is quoted by Thomas J. Wise in **A Shelley Library,** London, 1924, p. 95.

‡ **Shelley Memorials,** edited by Lady Jane Shelley, London, 1859, p. 145. Also quoted by Thomas Love Peacock in his **Memoirs of Shelley,** London, 1909, Frowde, p. 71.

** The entry is of August 22, 1820. The Journal is unpublished, but is quoted in Thomas J. Wise's **A Shelley Library,** p. 103.

†† **Elegy on the Death of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** London, 1822.

‡‡ **Verses on the Death of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** London, 1822.

*** Letter CXCV, **The Letters of Charles Lamb,** edited by Alfred Ainger. New York, Armstrong and Son, n. d. Two volumes.

I can no more understand Shelley than you can. His poetry is "thin sown with profit or delight." Yet I must point to your notice a sonnet conceived and expressed with a witty delicacy. It is that addressed to one who hated him, but who could not persuade him to hate **him** again. His coyness to the other's passion — (for hate demands a return as much as love, and starves without it) — is most arch and pleasant. Pray, like it very much. For his theories and nostrums, they are oracular enough; but I either comprehend 'em not, or there is 'miching malice' and mischief in 'em, but, for the most part, ringing with their own emptiness. Hazlitt said well of 'em — 'Many are the wiser and better for reading Shakespeare, but nobody was ever wiser and better for reading Shelley.'*

In striking contrast to Lamb's lack of sympathy was the attitude of Sir Egerton Brydges, antiquarian and renovator of interesting works in the older English literature. He recognized Shelley's genius, but without intemperate enthusiasm, and thought that he had come, before 1834, to be much over-rated, in doubtful compensation for earlier abuse. In Brydges' Geneva reprint, done in 1824, of the English part of Phillips' **Theatrum Poetarum,** he included among the notes generous quotations from Shelley's lyric verse, a passage in description of Shelley from Thomas Medwin's **Ahasuerus,** and a lengthy memoir, full of eulogy, which Medwin had supplied him.† His comments of about ten years later gave witness to the reaction which had taken place in Shelley's favor:

With what contempt was Shelley treated in his life — how is he now praised — and even overpraised —‡

A part of this posthumous popularity he attributed to Shelley's melancholy drowning. To the poet of passion he paid the following tribute:

I know of no good poetry which does not spring as much from the heart as from the head. A poet may have fierce passions and wrong passions, but passion he must have.**

And of Shelley's shortcomings he wrote:

Ridiculed and neglected while alive, and represented in most of the literary journals as a bye-word of absurdity, charlatanism, and incomprehensibility; — now he is gone, he is lauded up to the skies as a supernatural genius! He **was** a genius, often pursuing a wrong direction and chasing **ignes fatuos:** but the present encomiums of him are extravagant —††

The comparison of Shelley with Byron, a critical device much to be overworked after his day, Sir Egerton made use of in his most significant interpretation:

The imaginative feelings of Byron and Shelley had but little similitude: those of Shelley were mystical and clouded: those of Byron, clear, distinct, direct, and bold. Shelley was more theoretical and abstract; Byron, however imaginative, had it always mixed up with humanity, — human passions and human forms. Shelley had gleams of poetry; Byron was always poet-

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* Ibid., Letter CCXLVI. Cf. **The Life of Charles Lamb** by E. V. Lucas, New York and London, Putnam, 1905, Vol. I, p. 544. It was Lamb who wrote, "Shelley the great Atheist has gone down by water to eternal fire!" — **Works of Charles and Mary Lamb,** edited by E. V. Lucas, London, Methuen, 1905, Vol. VII, p. 573. For the "sonnet," which is no sonnet, see the inconsequential **Lines to a Reviewer,** Cambridge edition, p. 400.

† Saintsbury, in **A History of Criticism,** (Vol. III, p. 283), carelessly attributing Medwin's eulogy to Brydges, made the following remark on Brydges' attitude toward Shelley: "Such enthusiastic admiration of Shelley as is displayed in the notes to his Geneva reprint of the English part of Phillips' **Theatrum Poetarum** in 1824, is not often shown by a man of sixty-two for a style of poetry entirely different from that to which he has been accustomed. And it shows, not merely how true a training the study of older literature is for the appreciation of the newer, but that there must have been something to train." Sir Egerton's admiration extended only so far as to lead him to quote Shelley's **Spirit of Delight** and **Stanzas Written in Dejection,** and to include Medwin's memoir with careful acknowledgment, and was greatly qualified by later passages in the **Autobiography.** His poetic taste in quoting from **Ahasuerus** was more than questionable, and he said no word of Shelley's longer and more characteristic reformatory poems. The memoir is to be found in Medwin's **Conversations of Lord Byron.** The **Ahasuerus** may be noted as an interesting source of the sentimental view of Shelley which may be called the legend of the "Eternal Child." Cf. Gilfillan's **Literary Portraits,** herein discussed.*

‡ **Autobiography of Sir Egerton Brydges.** London, 1834. Two volumes. Vol. II, p. 337.

** Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 364-365.

†† Ibid., Vol. I, p. 322.

ical. Shelley never put a master's hand upon his subject; he could not mould it to his will.*

Though Shelley suffered in this comparison, the sympathetic moderation of the antiquarian is in pleasant contrast to the flippant contempt of Lamb.

The early abuse of Shelley, of which Sir Egerton made mention, was of course by no means universal, as we shall see; and one pleasing exception to it is to be found in the very favorable advance notice of **Charles I** which had appeared in the **London Magazine** for January, 1821:

> We differ entirely with the creeds of Mr. Shelley; but we do not on that account refrain from confessing, that he is unquestionably one of the very first of our now living English poets.†

In calling attention to Shelley's principles, in dissenting from them, and in praising his artistic merit, this passage strikes the keynote of much of the contemporary comment.

It was, apparently, Shelley's personal irregularity of behavior and belief that brought him most emphatically to the attention of many persons of his time. Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe acclaimed the rising of this "literary Sun," as Beddoes had lamented its decline, but with different feelings:

> Talking of books, we have lately had a literary Sun shine forth upon us here, before whom our former luminaries must hide their diminished heads — a Mr. Shelley, of University College, who lives upon arsenic, aqua-fortis, half-an-hour's sleep in the night, and is desperately in love with the memory of Margaret Nicholson. He hath published, what he terms, the Posthumous Poems, printed for the benefit of Mr. Peter Finnerty; which, I am grieved to say, though stuffed full of treason, are extremely dull; but the Author is a great genius, and, if he be not clapped up in Bedlam or hanged, will certainly prove one of the sweetest swans on the tuneful margin of the Charwell . . . . Shelley's style is much like that of Moore burlesqued. . . .‡

Upon Shelley's expulsion from Oxford, Sharpe wrote to Lady Charlotte:

> He is, poor fellow! in the last stages of a consumption; so the critics should be merciful, for he will never write better, nor worse, (which is of more consequence to brother authors,) and a deathbed repentance of such literary crimes is as bitter as it is useless.**

To this letter was attached the following note, probably by John Galt, who is known to have edited at least the third and fourth volumes of the **Diary:**

> Mr. Shelley had genius — he had power; but his genius was an evil one, and his powers were directed to a bad end, or what was the same in effect, to no end at all. The best of his phrenzied compositions have all the deleterious qualities of alcohol; and Hamlet might have appropriately apostrophized his shade in the questioning words — "Bring'st with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell?"††

Whether or not Galt wrote that condemnatory footnote, he later placed himself, by the familiar appeal to the rightness of the many, among those who found Shelley deficient in intellectual power and grasp:

> . . . his works were sullied with the erroneous inductions of an understanding which, inasmuch as he regarded all the existing world in the wrong, must be considered as having been either shattered or defective.‡‡

Another man of letters of the time judged Shelley more favorably, even while thinking him wrong, and perceived, as few then seem to have done, that Shelley's quarrel was with a false and conventional God, executed in the image of man's mistaken mind, rather than with Deity. In his diary, Henry Crabb Robinson wrote, for March the second, 1828:

> Read the second act of "Prometheus," which raised my opinion very much of Shelley as a poet, and improved it in all respects . . . his supposed

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* Ibid., Vol. I, p. 329.
† Vol. for 1821, p. 68.
‡ A letter to the diarist from C. K. Sharpe, March 15, 1811, appearing on pages 58-59, Vol. I, of a **Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth,** by Lady Charlotte Bury. 4 Vols. Vol. I: 1838.
** Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 98-99. Letter dated in October, 1811.
†† Ibid., Vol. II, p. 99.
‡‡ Galt's **Life of Byron,** quoted in **Fraser's Magazine,** p. 365, Vol. II, 1830-'31.

Atheism is a mere metaphysical crochet . . . *

And on January the tenth, 1836, he added, having gone back to Shelley's earlier and more radical poem:

> Read the notes to Shelley's "Queen Mab," as well as, here and there, bits of his poetry . . . . The **God** he denies seems to be, after all, the God of the superstitious. I suspect that he has been guilty of the fault of which I find I have all my life been guilty . . . of inferring that there can be no truth behind the palpable falsehoods propounded to one.†

About the time of the first of these two gentle and perspicacious entries of Robinson, Thomas Carlyle was writing, in "Characteristics,"

> Hear a Shelley filling the earth with inarticulate wail; like the infinite, inarticulate grief and weeping of forsaken infants.‡

For the Scottish philosopher was grouping Shelley with those spiritual champions with whom wrestles the "Divine Idea of the World," who contend with a spiritually chaotic universe in struggle for a new revelation of the "Godlike," and whose struggle ends in defeat.

Carlyle imputed to Shelley nothing worse than failure in a noble campaign of the spirit; later, Ruskin, taking issue with even the artistic validity of Shelley's poetry, the one virtue which the poet's own contemporaries were readiest to grant him, warned those who would form a sound aesthetic taste against reading his poetry:

> Cast Coleridge at once aside, as sickly and useless; and Shelley, as shallow and verbose . . . .**

And, in his discussion of "Imagination Contemplative," though he had found Shelley useful for illustration, he added,

> Let it not be supposed that I mean to compare the sickly dreaming of Shelley over clouds and waves with the masculine and magnificent grasp of men and things which we find in Scott. . . .††

Thus, in his evangelism of good taste and artistic appreciation, Ruskin condemned Shelley's aesthetic influence, and further suggested that his poems were empty of any valid thought.

But Ruskin's was a specialized and highly purposeful view, and of a later time. By the time in which Sir Egerton Brydges was writing of the undue expansion of Shelley's reputation, he was receiving, from sources in a sense official for literary verdicts, thoughtful evaluations which, in their temperate expression, came very near the truth; and with two of these we may conclude this preliminary view. Allan Cunningham, in his **Biographical and Critical History of British Literature,** having spoken of **The Revolt of Islam** and **Prometheus Unbound** as "stories which some resolve not to understand," made summary as follows of the contemporary opinion:

> His admirers, in these mystic strains, perceived a high and godlike philosophy; others saw a design to overturn church and state; nor were men wanting who called the poet mad, and his verses nonsense; but the bulk of mankind agreed that the poems were rapt, fiery, and energetic.‡‡

And the editor of the London **Athenaeum,** Mr. Dilke, in what may be considered an official utterance by that dispassionate journal, attached the following note to the Memoir of Thomas Medwin:

> Shelley was a worshipper of truth, Keats of beauty; Shelley had the greater power, Keats the finer imagination, — both were single-hearted, admirable men . . . . Shelley and Keats were equal enthusiasts, had the same hope of the moral improvement of society, and the ultimate triumph of truth; and Shelley, who lived longest, carried all the generous feelings of youth into manhood. Age enlarged, not narrowed his sympathies, and learning bowed down his humanity to feel its brotherhood with the humblest of its fellow-creatures. If not judged by creeds and conventional opinions, Shelley must be considered a moral teacher, both by precept and example; he scattered the seed of truth, so it appeared to him, everywhere, and upon all occasions, — confident, that however disregarded, however long it might be buried, it would not perish, but spring up hereafter in the

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* **Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson,** New York, 1877, Vol. II, p. 79.
† Ibid., Vol. II, p. 221.
‡ **Critical and Miscellaneous Essays,** first published in 1839, Vol. IV, p. 28. "Characteristics" appeared in the **Edinburgh Review,** No. 108, 1831.
** **The Elements of Drawing,** New York, 1877, p. 232.
†† **Modern Painters,** New York, 1880. Vol. II, p. 199.
‡‡ Paris, 1834, pp. 101-102.

sunshine of its welcome, and its golden fruitage be garnered by grateful men . . .*

These comments, drawn from a considerable period immediately following Shelley's first publication of verse, and containing the opinions of men of varied outlooks and philosophies, indicate a number of themes which should be kept in mind in approaching the longer critical essays and reviews. The major poets of Shelley's time said little, and what they said was rather in recognition of his ability than in approval of his aims and poetic achievements. A few friends and kindred spirits were enthusiastic in their praise of his verse, but selected that for the most favorable comment which was, perhaps, least characteristic of his philosophy of social renovation. Other literary men saw in his writings instances of juvenile rebellion, intemperate condemnation of the social order, ineffectual attempts at a higher idealism. Of these, one — Ruskin — found even his aesthetic influence bad. The impact of his unconventional life upon the critical mind, the abuse accorded him by some of his contemporaries, and the growth of a sentimental Shelley legend have been briefly indicated; and for fuller illustrations of these we are to look among the more ambitious writings. But most significant is the fact that disapproval of his doctrines and recognition of his inherent genius were combined in such a way in these commentaries as to leave the emphasis upon his philanthropic aims and his conscious position as the spiritual apostle of a more perfect world.

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* Forman's edition of Medwin's **Life of Shelley,** Oxford University Press, 1913, p. 306 and note. **The Athenaeum,** 1832.

CHAPTER II

CONTEMPORARY CRITICS AND REVIEWS: 1818-1840

"For more than half a century English literature had been distinguished by its moral purity, — the effect, and, in its turn, the cause of an improvement in national manners. A father might, without apprehension of evil, have put into the hands of his children, any book which issued from the press, if it did not bear either in its title-page, or frontispiece, manifest signs that it was intended as furniture for the brothel. There was no danger in any work which bore the name of a respectable publisher, or was to be procured at any respectable bookseller's. This was particularly the case with regard to our poetry. It is now so no longer; and woe to those by whom the offense cometh!"*

So wrote the Laureate, Robert Southey, upon the occasion of the publication of the **Vision of Judgment,** in his renowned attack upon the "Satanic School" of which Lord Byron was the head. Aside from its application to Shelley, who was associated with the school of Lucifer, and entirely apart from the matter of its provocation of Byron's assaults upon the conservative poets, this outburst is significant of the critical temper of those years which immediately preceded and followed the death of Shelley. The period was one of literally Scriptural theology, definite and codified moral concepts, sincere churchly faith, and a firm belief in the moral powers of poetry and in the duty of poets to render the influence of their verse beneficial to public manners and private tastes.

Interesting evidence of these tenets of the times is to be found in a Memoir written by one John Watkins and issued in 1822 by Henry Colburn, the publisher of the **New Monthly Magazine,** in an attempt to protect the public morals against the indecent and blasphemous poetry of Lord Byron.† This was an ambitious and ably written volume of more than four hundred pages, affecting to deal fairly and judiciously with the influence and moral responsibilities of England's then most famous poet; it is more significant of the critical temper of its time than any public review of the far less popular Shelley. Its intentions were, to all appearances, quite honest, and the premises upon which its judgments of Byron's poetry were based seem founded confidently upon the current dictates of accepted criticism. The volume was addressed to William Gifford, and its preface, which characterized that dictator of public literary opinion as the person who had contributed "more than any man in this generation, to preserve our poetry from contamination, and our public morals from injury," and which besought him to speak in his official capacity against the "chartered Libertine," gave evidence of the mighty weight of the established reviews in the scale of critical thought and public opinion.

Among the indices employed by Watkins of established critical standards and prevalent views of the poetic art are to be noted the frequent appeals to the opinion of Samuel Johnson; the old respect for the heroic couplet; the belief that moral fallacies in the "Romantic" poetry were more dangerous, because more difficult of detection, than corresponding errors in purely didactic verse; the view that while a fictitious character in a novel may be immoral, a character in poetry must be moral; the related tenet that poetry, in proportion to its merit, is of necessity powerfully efficacious for either good or evil; and the corresponding conception of the poet as, in his proper and only admissible function, an agent responsible for the state of the public morals — a public utilitarian of righteousness.

This view of poetry as preeminently a moral agency was derived, apparently, not only from eighteenth-century thought but also from the current interpretation, influenced by that century, of the great poets of antiquity. The law was thus laid down by Watkins:

> . . . . the works of the greatest poets of antiquity, show that the description of nature in its external forms, and of art in its numerous varieties, is only subordinate to the moral object of improving, as well as entertaining, the mind. The writer who disregards this essential end of poetic composition, and who betrays an indifference to the effect likely to be produced by his representations, is guilty of a flagrant insult upon social order, for which all the elegance of versification, strength of language, and richness of imagery, cannot make an atonement.‡

It is also possible to trace in Watkins' creed the strong influence of the Warton school of criticism — the appeal to the beauty of external nature for its inspirational and moral beneficence — and we find this influence operating strongly upon the periodical critics of poetry, especially in their practice of cataloguing the descriptive beauties of any poem under consideration, with an eye to the spiritual as well as to the merely aesthetic effect.

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* **Poetical Works of Robert Southey,** Boston, Houghton Mifflin, n. d., Vol. X, p. 194.

† **Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Honourable Lord Byron,** published anonymously by Henry Colburn and Co., London, 1822.

‡ Ibid., p. 160.

With this tentative view of the critical bias of the times, we may turn to the contemporary evaluations of Shelley with the anticipation that his interpreters will regard him as morally, as well as artistically, responsible for his creations, that they will be unprepared by their creeds and training for the reception of his extreme imaginative flights; that they will give special attention to his treatment of nature, inanimate and human; and that, if the most popular and "noblest" poet of his time is to receive rebuke, the more obscure and even more unsocial Shelley will fare no better at their hands.

By this approach we arrive at our examination into the periodical responses which greeted Shelley's poetry and teachings during the years of his life and within the period which saw the publication of his posthumous and collected writings.

The journals of the time, which commonly mixed political and literary topics for the sake of variety, were legion; but **Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,** the **Edinburgh Review,** and the **Quarterly Review** of London were especially influential. They had given a new lease on life and a greatly varied range to the medium of the periodical essay. Contributions were written by editors and by independent men of letters, among whom were the leading prose authors of the period and some of the prominent poets; their contents were frequently biassed by considerations of political difference and by the rivalry of competing journals. Upon matters of artistic creed and theory there was general agreement, though, naturally, in the matter of perceptive and expository skill there were immense differences, both between journals and between articles in the same journal.

It was in **Blackwood's** that the notorious attacks upon the "Cockney School of Poetry" were begun and continued by an anonymous warrior who signed himself "Z." Leigh Hunt was, of course, the principal victim. It is hard to believe that his obstreperous career as scourge of the government had had nothing to do with it; but it seems true that the critic of **Blackwood's** had a sincere artistic objection to the sentimentality and over-abundant naturalistic adornment of Keats and Hunt, rusticating Cockneys, who knew little restraint of emotion and no restraint of the tendency to anatomize flowers and grasshoppers and to carry the embellishment of their poetry with all the plunder of field and sky and river to a fantastic and most unclassical excess.

Blackwood's Magazine was the organ of a younger and more liberal Tory sentiment than that which inspired the **Quarterly Review.** It published more work of a diverting and creative sort than the other principal reviews, and voiced an effectual protest against the lukewarm defence of religion and the cool reception of genius which characterized the self-confident **Edinburgh Review.** With it were associated the names of John Wilson, himself a poet and the principal creator of the **Noctes Ambrosianae;** Lockhart, translator of Spanish ballads and author of the life of Scott; John Galt; Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd; and the slashing buccaneer of criticism, Dr. Maginn.*

Like the other periodicals of its kind, it had its political bias, but, as Professor Elton says, its pages indicate at least what a large portion of the British people were thinking about literature and politics at the time of writing. Mary Russell Mitford paid it the following tribute shortly after it was founded.

> You ask me about Blackwood's **Edinburgh Magazine**: I will tell you just what it is — a very libellous ,wicked, scandalous, story-telling, entertaining work — a sort of Chapel-of-ease to my old friend, the **Quarterly Review**; abusing wits and poets and politicians of **our** side, and praising all of yours; abusing Hazlitt, abusing John Keats, abusing Leigh Hunt . . . . and lauding Mr. Gifford, Mr. Croker, and Mr. Canning.†

Perhaps she took some of the sport too lightly, but at least she acknowledged its spirited and captivating quality.

The critic of the "Cockney School," in a public letter to Leigh Hunt, had threatened to extend his attack to include some of Hunt's "younger and less important auxiliaries, the Keatses, the Shelleys and the Webbes,"‡ but Shelley's turn in that devastating series apparently did not come. Early in the next year, however, there appeared "Observations on the Revolt of Islam," a review commonly attributed to Christopher North himself.** This article identified Shelley, as to his opinions, with the Cockney School; he was one of "the sophistical and phantastical enemies of religion and good order among mankind," whose true and proper reward was to be the contempt of those whose interests he would harm. But he was of stronger intellect and altogether greater importance than the other Cockneys such as Hunt and Keats, who were "indeed men of considerable cleverness, but as poets . . . . worthy of sheer and instant contempt." The influence of the Cockney School had not yet been able

> entirely to obscure in him the character, or take away from him the privileges of the genius born within him.

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* See Oliver Elton's **A Survey of English Literature,** New York, Macmillan, 1920, Vol. I, Chapter XIII, for a discussion of the principal reviews of the period.

† **Letters of Mary Russell Mitford,** London, 1925. Edited by R. Brimley Johnson. Letter of Nov. 9, 1818, p. 148.

‡ **Blackwood's,** Jan. 1818, Vol. II, pp. 414-417.

** Ibid., Jan. 1819, Vol. IV, pp. 475-486.

He was the more seriously to be reckoned with inasmuch as

> he possesses the qualities of a powerful and vigorous intellect, and therefore his fate cannot be sealed so speedily as theirs.

Of the poem itself it was written that it

> bears unfortunately the clearest marks of its author's execrable system, but it is impressed everywhere with the more noble and majestic footsteps of his genius.

After accounting for much of the silence of the professional critics upon this poem by referring it to "the painful feeling . . . which attends the contemplation of perverted powers" and to the fear of public disapproval of any favorable review of so dangerous a work, Wilson expressed the conjecture that the very obscurity of the poem may have been a bar to public notice. He characterized it as fine but not always intelligible, unskillful in its allegory, unfinished and hasty; he thought that these blemishes would quite prevent its ever becoming popular with the generality of readers. It was with obvious relief that he turned from the mention of its explosive contents to a consideration of its artistic excellencies.

> As a philosopher, our author is weak and worthless; — our business is with him as a poet, and, as such, he is strong, nervous, original; well entitled to take his place near to the great creative masters, whose works have shed its truest glory around the age wherein we live. As a political and infidel treatise, the Revolt of Islam is contemptible; — happily a great part of it has no necessary connexion either with politics or with infidelity. The native splendour of Mr. Shelley's faculties has been his safeguard from universal degradation, and a part, at least, of his genius, has been consecrated to themes worthy of it and of him. In truth, what he probably conceives to be the most exquisite ornaments of his poetry, appear, in our eyes, the chief deformities upon its texture; and had the whole been framed like the passages which we shall quote, — as the Revolt of Islam would have been a purer, so we have no doubt, would it have been a nobler, a loftier, a more majestic, and a more beautiful poem.

It was the critic's method thus to omit from detailed consideration the most startling of the social doctrines expressed in the poem, but he was able to discover one message the soundness of which convinced him that Shelley was "poetical" of mind. This was the theme of "human affections." In this Shelley was in harmony with the views of his time as to how human nature should be treated in poetry for the end of moral good.

> In the person of these martyrs [Laon and Cythna] the poet has striven to embody his ideas of the power and loveliness of human affections; and, in their history he has set forth a series of splendid pictures, illustrating the efficacy of these affections in overcoming the evils of private and of public life.

It was in the representation of this "intense, overmastering, unfearing, unfading love, that Mr. Shelley has proved himself to be a genuine poet." And it was thus that the poet had unintentionally furnished his critic with a theme for such praise as might be rendered without the fear of alienating the journal's readers; the more freely given, we may suppose, because the essayist was not aware that, in the earlier version, Shelley had intensified that "human affection" by making the lovers brother and sister as well.

But it was in approval of Shelley's exuberance of romantic poesy that Wilson could speak most gratefully and most in keeping with the expectancy of his readers.

> Mr. Shelly has displayed his possession of a mind intensely poetical, and of an exuberance of poetic language, perpetually strong and perpetually varied. In spite, moreover, of a certain perversion in all his modes of thinking. . . he has displayed many glimpses of right understanding and generous feeling, which must save him from the unmingled condemnation even of the most rigorous judges. His destiny is entirely in his own hands; if he acts wisely it cannot fail to be a glorious one; if he continues to pervert his talents, by making them the instruments of a base sophistry, their splendour will only contribute to render his disgrace the more conspicuous. Mr. Shelly, whatever his errors may have been, is a scholar, a gentleman, and a poet; and he must therefore despise from his soul the only eulogies to which he has hitherto been accustomed — paragraphs from the Examiner, and sonnets from Johnny Keats. He has it in his power to select better companions; and if he does so, he may very securely promise himself abundance of better praise.

But it would seem that until Shelley should leave such bad company he was to

expect no more from **Blackwood's** than the wistful and evangelical acknowledgment of his technical genius:

> His praise is, in our judgment, that of having poured over his narrative a very rare strength and abundance of poetic imagery and feeling — of having steeped every word in the essence of his inspiration.

It is first to be observed of this essay that it is critical proselytism. Wilson made no mistake in regarding the radical proposals of this poems as the main end and aim in Shelley's mind. But he apparently did not see that Shelley was an original and independent thinker. In attributing an antisocial taint to the influence of the "Cockney School," he was mistaken; this idea could only have arisen from the similarity of Shelley's emancipatory zeal to the principles of Hunt in the **Examiner,** and from the knowledge of their friendship. But it is evident that Wilson could and did see that the meaning of the poem was prophecy and preachment, and that he committed the deadly sin of criticism by failing to deal thoughtfully with the ideas that constituted the essential message of the poet. Reasons for the omission we have already noticed; whatever Wilson's personal judgment upon Shelley's doctrines would have been, we see that his public criticism was distorted by those very public responsibilities which were the conditions of its creation. We find Shelley's poem approved to the extent that its qualities coincided with the current taste, vogue, and moral conservatism; we see his teachings condemned for their corresponding heterodoxy, and that apparently without a thoughtful consideration. The philosophical analysis which was denied them by public opinion and by the limitations of periodical authorship might, if it had been applied, have come to judgments no more favorable than these; but, in such a case, the critical method would have been more nearly valid and the poem damned or saved upon its professed intentions.

Shelley's persistence in his evil ways, however, soon elicited more specific commentaries upon his doctrines, the more specific as hopes for his conversion to orthodoxy dwindled more and more. He had not intended **Rosalind and Helen** primarily as a doctrinal poem, but it proved to contain matter disturbing to the moral sense of the **Blackwood's** reviewer.* The critic found this poem also expressive of moral perversion.

> For while this modern eclogue breathes throughout strong feeling, and strong passion, and strong imagination, it exhibits at the same time a strange perversion of moral principle — a wilful misrepresentation of the influence of the laws of human society on human virtue and happiness — and a fierce and contemptuous scorn of those sacred institutions which nature protects and guards for the sake of her own worth and dignity.

These errors did not appear to the reviewer, he said, as the errors of a weak intellect or of intemperate anger,

> but he often writes like a man angry and dissatisfied with the world, because he is angry and dissatisfied with himself — impotently striving to break those bonds which he yet feels are rivetted by a higher power — and because his own headstrong and unhappy will frets and fevers within the salutary confinement of nature's gracious laws, impiously scheming to bring these laws into disrepute, by representing them as the inventions and juggleries of tyranny and priestcraft.

After the usual admission of Shelley's merely poetical excellence, and a review of the plot and purple passages of the poem, the critic stated his belief that the journal which he served had done, and would continue to do, honor to genius wherever it occurred, but that it must specifically refute his hurtful doctrines, seeking always his return to more healthful faith and practice.

> And, first of all, because priests have been bloody and intolerant, is it worthy of a man of liberal education and great endowments, to talk with uniform scorn and contempt of the ministers of religion? Can anything be more puerile in taste, more vulgar in feeling, more unfounded in fact, or more false in philosophy? Mr. Shelley goes out of his way — out of the way of the leading passion of his poetry to indulge in the gratification of this low and and senseless abuse — and independently of all higher considerations, such ribaldry utterly destroys all impassioned emotion in the hearts of his readers, and too frequently converts Mr. Shelley from a poet into a satirist, from a being who ought, in his own pure atmosphere, to be above all mean prejudices, into a slave, basely walking in voluntary trammels.

That Shelley should have fallen thus into condemnation of Christianity itself from condemnation of the corruption of allegedly Christian institutions seemed natural enough to the critic. We have observed in what sense this was true. But it seemed much stranger that the poet had not set up any laws for the behavior of his char-

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* **Blackwood's,** June 1819, Vol. V., p. 268 et seq. The review would appear to have been by the same hand as the preceding Shelley article, but mention of Wilson among the great English poets throws doubts upon the North authorship.

acters, these older laws once having been condemned. In **The Revolt** there were certainly definite principles of action behind the deeds of Laon and Cythna; what was lacking was the portrayal of a realistically convincing method by which their reforms were to be accomplished. We have seen that, according to Shelley's theory of poetry, it meant no hiatus in his work to decline to represent concrete modes of social reconstruction. However, in **Rosalind and Helen** we have not the directly doctrinal purpose of the preceding poem, but the human representation of the misfortunes that had befallen certain persons through the conflict of social law with the dictates of the heart. The tyranny of such laws was condemned, but the action of the characters was not directed at the representation of a crusade of resistance against the tyranny. The following criticism therefore, if taken literally, may be correctly applied to **Rosalind and Helen,** but should not be extended to include **The Revolt,** unless what was meant was that the poem offered no concrete program of rehabilitation.

> One seeks, in vain, through his poetry, fine as it often is, for any principles of action in the characters who move before us. They are at all times fighting against the law of the world, the law of nations, and the law of God — there is nothing satisfactory in their happiness, and always something wilful in their misery. Nor could Mr. Shelley's best friend and most warm admirer do otherwise than confess that he is ever an obscure and cheerless moralist, even when his sentiments are most lofty, and when he declaims with greatest eloquence against the delusions of religious faith. That a poet should be blind, deaf, and insensible to the divine beauty of Christianity, is wonderful and deplorable, when, at the same time, he is so alive to the beauty of the external world, and, in many instances, to that of the human soul.

The essayist was thus struck, as is not surprising, more by the destructive than by the constructive aspect of Shelley's work, and more by the implied pessimism of his attack on contemporary things than by the essential optimism of his prophecy and faith for the future. **Rosalind and Helen,** it is true, might more justly provoke such a view than the other poems of inspirational forecast. The critic was wrong in assigning the cause of the rebellion to remorse of conscience; if any one fact is known beyond a doubt, it is that Shelley's views were held with a dynamic certainty of their rightness.

> It is also but too evident, from Mr. Shelley's poetry, that he looks with an evil eye on many of the most venerable institutions of civil polity. His creed seems to be the same, in many points, as that once held by a celebrated political writer and novelist, who has lived to abjure it. But in all that Godwin wrote, one felt the perfect sincerity of the man — whereas Mr. Shelley seems to have adopted such opinions, not from any deep conviction of their truth, but from waywardness and caprice, from the love of singularity, and, perhaps, as a vain defence against the reproaches of his own conscience. His opinions, therefore, carry no authority along with them to others — nay, they seem not to carry any authority with them to himself. The finer essences of his poetry never penetrate them — the hues of his imagination never clothe them with attractive beauty. The cold, bald, clumsy, and lifeless parts of this poem are those in which he obtrudes upon us his contemptible and long-exploded dogmas. Then his inspiration deserts him. He never stops or stumbles in his career, except when he himself seems previously to have laid blocks before the wheels of his chariot.

Except for those passages in which the violent expression of doctrine does occasionally banish the poetic quality, it may hardly be said that the level of Shelley's inspiration varies thus regularly in inverse proportion to his didactic zeal; it is far from true that the ideas of the poems, however they may have seemed to invalidate the poetry which expressed them, were insincerely held, although it does seem that Shelley's violence of attack was intended, as was his use of the name "Atheist," to provoke response, by spectacular revolt, for the further debating of his theses of right and wrong. But these alleged qualities seemed to the writer to rob the poem of all moral force:

> Accordingly there is no great moral flow in his poetry. Thus, for example, what lesson are we taught by this eclogue, **Rosalind and Helen?** Does Mr. Shelley mean to prove that marriage is an evil institution, because by it youth and beauty may be condemned to the palsied grasp of age, avarice and cruelty? Does he mean to shew the injustice of law, because a man may by it bequeath his property to strangers, and leave his wife and children beggars? Does he mean to shew the wickedness of that law by which illegitimate children do not succeed to the paternal and hereditary estates of their father? The wickedness lay with Lionel and with Helen, who, aware of them all, indulged their own passion, in violation of such awful restraints — and gave life to innocent creatures for whom this world was in all probability to be a world of poverty, sorrow, and humiliation.

> But we have stronger charges still — even than these — against this poet. What is it that he can purpose to himself by his everlasting allusions to the unnatural loves of brothers and sisters? In this poem there are two stories of this sort — altogether gratuitous — and, as far as we can discover, illustrative of nothing . . . . Such monstrosities betoken a diseased mind; — but be this as it may — it is most certain that such revolting passages coming suddenly upon us, in the midst of so much exquisite beauty, startle us out of our dream of real human life, and not only break in upon, but put to flight all the emotions of pleasure and of pathos, with which we were following its disturbed courses. God knows there is enough of evil and guilt in this world, without our seeking to raise up such hideous and unnatural phantasms of wickedness — but thus to mix them up for no earthly purpose with the ordinary events of human calamity and crime, is the last employment which a man of genius would desire — for there seems to be really no inducement to it, but a diseased desire of degrading and brutifying humanity.

The essayist did here strike upon a device which we know Shelley used to startle his readers out of lethargic and conventionalized thought upon social evils and to emphasize his substitution of spiritual love for conventionalized lust. But, although the eclogue was in part a poem of social intent and a more nearly realistic and less glorified version of **Laon and Cythna,** and although incest may have been a logically valid deduction from the belief in spiritualized love,* it does not follow that the unnatural connection was offered by Shelley as an element in the practical readjustment of society, any more than that he expected nature actually to effect the sudden change of nightshade berries from poison to wholesome food which he used symbolically in the millennial conclusion of **The Revolt of Islam.**

The principal error of the **Blackwood's** philosopher was his belief that the social and moral implications of Shelley's poems were no essential part of his genius. Because the poetry marred by these disturbing ideas was otherwise brilliant, he thought that Shelley might be reformed into as brilliant an expositor of the acceptable creeds. In mere skill Shelley was judged worthy of a place among the best of his contemporaries, and **Blackwood's** had not yet given him up.

> It is impossible to read a page of his Revolt of Islam, without perceiving that in nerve and pith of conception he approaches more nearly to Scott and Byron than any other of their contemporaries — while in this last little eclogue, he touches with equal mastery the same softer strings of pathos and tenderness which had before responded so delightfully to the more gentle inspiration of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Wilson. His fame will yet be a glorious plant if he does not blast its expanding leaves by the suicidal chillings of immorality — a poison that cannot be resisted long by any product of the soil of England.†

In November of the same year **Blackwood's** returned to the consideration of a youthful work, **Alastor,** which was expected to interest the readers of the **Magazine** as an instance of "the earliest efforts of a mind destined, in our opinion, under due discipline and self-management, to achieve great things in poetry."‡ A quotation from Shelley's preface was offered as a partial but inadequate enlightenment of the unnecessary allegorical darkness of the poem; the allegory itself was condemned as an easy way to avoid the difficult responsibilities of poetic clarity.

> Our readers will not expect, from this somewhat dim enunciation, at all times to see the drift of this wild poem; but we think they will feel, notwithstanding, that there is the light of poetry even in the darkness of Mr. Shelley's imagination.

It is interesting to notice that the critic condemns as unpoetical the journey through the volcanic cavern, and praises the description of the terrestrial voyage — elements which resemble, in the one case, the subterranean adventures of Endymion which seem to have brought condemnation upon Keats, and, in the other, the wanderings over earth which characterized, by their spirit of emotional errantry and historical nostalgia, the popular works of Byron. The death scene in **Alastor** was considered of "great sublimity," and the minor poems of the volume of much beauty.

This was followed by an attack upon the **Quarterly Review** for its abuse of Shelley. A dunce had been rating a man of genius, and deserved public rebuke.

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* See Dowden's **Life of Shelley,** London, Kegan Paul, Trench, 1887, Vol. II, p. 130.

† Another comparison with a great contemporary appeared in December of that year in a review of Hunt's **Literary Pocket-Book:** "It would greatly amuse us to meet in company together Johnny Keates and Percy Bysshe Shelley, — and as they are both friends of Mr. Leigh Hunt, we do not despair of witnessing the conjunction of these planets. . . . A bird of Paradise and a Friezeland fowl would not look more absurdly on the same perch." **Blackwood's,** Dec. 1819. Two years later a reviewer of the current **Pocket-Book** thought Shelley negligible. See **Blackwood's,** Dec. 1812, Vol. X, p. 574.

‡ Nov. 1819, Vol. VI, pp. 148-154.

> In the present state of public feeling, with regard to poets and poetry, a critic cannot attempt to defraud a poet of his fame, without paying the penalty either of his ignorance or of his injustice. So long as he confines the expression of his envy or stupidity to works of moderate or doubtful merit, he may escape punishment; but if he dare to insult the spirit of England by contumelious or scornful treatment of any one of her gifted sons, that contumely and that scorn will most certainly be flung back upon himself, till he be made to shrink and to shiver beneath the load. It is not in the power of all the critics alive to blind one true lover of poetry to the splendours of Mr. Shelley's genius — and the reader who, from mere curiosity, should turn to the Revolt of Islam to see what sort of trash it was that so moved the wrath and spleen and the scorn of the Reviewer, would soon feel, that to understand the greatness of the poet, and the littleness of his traducer, nothing more was necessary than to recite to his delighted sense any six successive stanzas of that poem, so full of music, imagination, intellect, and passion.

The **Quarterly Reviewer** was likewise rebuked for certain "dark and oracular denunciations" against Shelley, with no specific charges of offense. **Blackwood's,** in contrast, recognized its responsibility to criticize definitely, rather than through libellous insinuations of evil.

> There are many wicked and foolish things in Mr. Shelley's creed, and we have not hitherto scrupled, nor shall we henceforth scruple to expose that wickedness and that folly. But we do not think that he believes his own creed — at least, that he believes it fully and to utter conviction — and we doubt not but the scales will yet all fall from his eyes. . . . Let his soul watch his soul, and listen to the voice of its own noble nature — and there is no doubt that the future will make amends for the past, whatever its errors may have been — and that the poet may yet be good, great and happy.

This was chiefly a defense of Shelley from the unsupported charges of the **Quarterly,** a defense of **Blackwood's** proud policy of recognizing genius of whatever kind, a deprecation of the allegorical element of **Alastor,** and a confirmation of the superficial beauty of the poem. The warning to Shelley, as well as the appreciation of his greatness, was based more on the preceding poems than on the one in question. The two themes of the poem — treatment of solitude as an evil thing, and the pursuit of ideal beauty — would hardly have offended the critic, but they were either not comprehended or else neglected for the usual aesthetic, rather than philosophical, appreciation of the poem's decorative, descriptive, and purely emotional phases. While objecting to the conclusions of Shelley's philosophy, the critic used methods of evaluation which were hedonistic rather than philosophical.

Late in 1820 the **Edinburgh Magazine** presented a lengthy review of **Prometheus Unbound.*** Shelley's work may be considered as having by that time outgrown whatever of green, spectacular rebelliousness and specific social condemnation it had had before, and as having come not only to its artistic maturity but to its status as imaginative and inspirational, rather than merely destructive and didactic, literature of uplift. But the reviewer found that Shelley's interpretation of the ancient story, which, as he thought, may in the Greek version have shadowed forth a Divinity suffering for mankind, was indicative of the poet's desire for the overthrow of all religion and all human government. Though Shelley had "manifested very extraordinary powers of language and imagination in his treatment of the allegory," he was dishonored by the idea which he had "so unblushingly and sinfully blazoned forth in every part of his production."

> With him it is quite evident that the Jupiter whose downfall has been predicted by Prometheus, means nothing more than Religion in general, that is, every human system of religious belief; and that, with the fall of this, he considers it perfectly necessary (as indeed we also believe, though with far different feelings) that every system of human government also should give way and perish. The patience of this contemplative spirit in Prometheus is to be followed by the daring of the active Demagorgon, at whose touch all 'old thrones' are at once and forever to be cast down into the dust.

The essayist judged that the poet's "luscious pictures" at the end of the play indicated the "relaxation of all moral rules," or "the extinction of all moral feelings, except that of a certain mysterious indefinable kindliness;" and that the poet contemplated that state of affairs as the ideal good.

> In short, it is quite impossible, that there should exist a more pestiferous mixture of blasphemy, sedition, and sensuality, than is visible in the whole structure and strain of this poem — which, nevertheless, and notwithstanding all the detestation its principles excite, must and will be considered by all that read it attentively, as abounding in poetical beauties of the highest

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* **Blackwood's,** Sept. 1820, Vol. VII, pp. 679-687.

order — as presenting many specimens not easily to be surpassed, of the moral sublime of eloquence — as overflowing with pathos, and most magnificent in description.

By reason of these very excellencies, therefore, there was no "spectacle more worthy of sorrow" than this so talented and so perverted poet en route to the highest station among those who

"Profane the God-given strength, and **mar the lofty line.**"

Though loath to enter upon the most conspicuous profanities of the drama, the critic adduced as evidence, and displayed in italics or capitals, such phrases as "THRONES WERE KINGLESS," and such lines as

"And women, too, **frank, beautiful, and kind,**
And changed to all which once they dared not be,
Yet being now, made earth like heaven; nor pride,
Nor jealousy, nor envy, nor ill shame,
The bitterest of those drops of treasured gall,
Spoilt the sweet taste of the Nepenthe, Love!"

In those passages of the poem, however, in which the essayist thought it possible to separate the allegorist from the poet —

> where the modern is content to write in the spirit of the ancient. . . one might almost fancy that we had recovered some of the lost sublimities of Aeschylus.

The opening scene was considered such a passage, and was quoted in the review.

Of the lesser poems in the volume the reviewer preferred **The Sensitive Plant.** This poem was a favorite with many critics of the period, and its choice is eloquent of the critical taste of the time. Of the **Ode to the West Wind** and **To a Skylark** he said merely that they were "abounding in richest melody of versification, and great tenderness of feeling," whereas **The Sensitive Plant** was "upon a level with the very happiest productions of the greatest contemporaries of Mr. Shelley."

Here the reviewer took occasion to deny the impious charges that **Blackwood's** had praised Shelley, while disapproving his principles, because of his financial independence; that it had abused Keats and Hunt, who were poor men, because they were vulnerable. Keats, he affirmed, the journal had tried to "whip out" of the pernicious Cockney influence, recognizing his talent.

> Last of all, what should forbid us to announce our opinion, that Mr. Shelley, as a man of genius, is not merely superior, either to Mr. Hunt, or to Mr. Keats, but altogether out of their sphere, and totally incapable of ever being brought into the most distant comparison with either of them. . . . We are afraid he shares, (at least with one of them), in an abominable system of belief, concerning man and the world, the sympathy arising out of which common belief, may probably sway more than it ought to do on both sides. But the truth of the matter is . . . that Mr. Shelley is destined to leave a great name behind him, and that we, as lovers of true genius, are most anxious that this name should ultimately be pure as well as great.

But, in conclusion, the reviewer was forced to return, however unwillingly, to Shelley's aims and principles as he saw them.

> We think they are on the whole, more undisguisedly pernicious in this volume, than even in his Revolt of Islam.

The **Ode to Liberty** he thought "just as wicked as anything that ever reached the world under the name of Mr. Hunt himself," while the lines

"That the pale name of PRIEST might shrink and dwindle
Into the HELL from which it first was hurled!"

were especially abominable.

> This is exactly a versification of the foulest sentence that ever issued from the pen of Voltaire. Let us hope that Percy Bysshe Shelley is not destined to leave behind him, like that great genius, a name for ever detestable to the truly FREE and the truly WISE. He talks in his preface about Milton, as a 'Republican,' and a 'bold inquirer into morals and religion.' Could anything make us despise Mr. Shelley's understanding, it would be such an instance of voluntary blindness as this! Let us hope, that ere long a lamp of genuine truth may be kindled within his 'bright mind,' and that he may walk in its light the path of the true demigods of English genius, having, like them, learned to 'fear God and honour the king.'

The essential difference between this and any modern commentary is that the

latter would be chiefly an artistic or aesthetic interpretation, while the former was chiefly a moral judgment, or an interpretation of moral influence. Singularly enough, it would seem that, if the poet's intent is to be recognized in the criticism, the moral critic has the more valid attitude. The criticism of the poetic art of the poem, as rendered in **Blackwood's,** was inadequate because too generalized, too little interpretative of the poem's aesthetic effect; this effect, of course, was largely destroyed by the shocking impact of the moral content. The reviewer, was, however, no more concerned with superlative epithets and purple passages than most of his contemporaries; it was not a period of artistic theorizing and analysis, at least not in periodical reviews. But, on the other hand, the moral interpretation suffered from too great detail and too slavish an adherence to the letter of what Shelley had written. The critic may be accused of being just a shade evil-minded in his discovery of a Mohammedan paradise in the last act. In any event, the poem was not, and Shelley's artistic theory would not have permitted it to be, a literal sociological description of the new era of which he was the prophet. Although he allowed a little of his own bias on sexual and governmental freedom to color his terminology, the poet was primarily symbolizing an era of spiritual love by the concrete imagery which it behooves poetry to use; and the sincere, though alarmist, critic interpreted his symbols literally, the while crying out against allegory. The poem, to be rightly known, necessitates the translation of its passages into the eternal verities which they represent; and this translation, in turn, necessitates a spirit less bowed under the weight of responsibility for public morals than that of the reviewer of **Blackwood's.** That journal's political status was interfering, though quite without conscious prejudice, with its function as minister of literature. The celestial drama was not a brief for the overthrow of all government and religion, so much as an "ideal poem of perpetual and triumphant progression — the Atlantis of Man Emancipated."* For **Blackwood's,** however, the result was the condemnation of the moral content of the poem as dangerous to public morals and loyalty, superlative praise of its imaginary and descriptive passages, and praise of the poet as a great genius, mingled with lamentation for his principles.

Having done what they could for a man whom they regarded as seriously menacing the public weal, it is not surprising that the reviewers of **Blackwood's** balked at **The Cenci,** which was loudly and repeatedly condemned in the reviews for its unspeakable subject. It was mentioned, however, in a review of Byron's lamentably inferior **Marino Faliero.**†

> Lord Byron in his preface says well, that The City of the Plague, The Fall of Jerusalem, and Miss Baillie's De Montford, are sufficient proof of the present existence of dramatic power **somewhere;** he might with great propriety have added to this list the name of 'the Cenci,' a very powerfully conceived and powerfully executed tragedy which was published last year by Mr. P. B. Shelly. But perhaps his lordship was withheld from mentioning that work, as we ourselves were from reviewing it, by the very disgusting nature of its subject — those vile extravagances, namely, of parricide and incest, by perpetual repetitions of which, or of something of the same kind, we begin to fear it is Mr. Shelly's mad resolution to destroy the effect of all his genius, and blast all the harvest of his fame. But Lord Byron's own tragedy is infinitely superior to the 'Cenci' . . .

Incidentally, **Blackwood's** added to the contradictory reports of Byron's opinion of Shelley. One of the "Letters of Timothy Tickler," who was probably the fiery Dr. Maginn, contained a very emphatic statement on the subject:

> I also know that he [Byron] had no respect for Shelley, except as a translator.‡

Whereas ten years later, one James Hamilton Browne, in a "Narrative of a Visit, in 1823, to the Seat of War in Greece," wrote:

> He [Byron] maintained that Shelley, from the wonderful facility of his versification, and aptitude at metaphor, would, but for his unfortunate predilection for metaphysics in poetry, have ranked in the foremost circle amongst modern bards: asserting that no one wrote better, when he selected a lucid theme, and allowed the reader fully to understand and appreciate his effusions.**

When the brilliant and bloodthirsty Dr. William Maginn, Irish prodigy of parody-criticism, took a hand in dealing with Shelley, **Blackwood's** no longer offered the poet a conditional refuge. Maginn's "Remarks on Shelley's Adonais"†† have been called by Saintsbury a "vain attempt to 'bluff' out the Keats matter by ridiculing **Adonais.**"‡‡ The weapon was a bludgeon. Opening with reminiscences of the

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* **A Memoir of Shelley,** by W. M. Rossetti, London, Shelley Society Publication, 1886, p. 97.
† **Blackwood's,** April, 1821, Vol. IX, p. 93.
‡ **Blackwood's,** Sept., 1824, Vol. XVI, pp. 291-304.
** **Blackwood's,** Sept., 1834, Vol. XXXVI, pp. 392-407.
†† **Blackwood's** for Dec., 1821, Vol. X. Here quoted from **Miscellaneous Writings.**
‡‡ **History of Criticism,** Vol. III, p. 488.

"Della Crusca school" of poets of some years before, Maginn proceeded to trace the influence of their asininities through the lines of **Adonais**, and found a target for his caricaturing irony at every caesura. The Della Crusca poets had been enamored of nature and sentimental inconsequentialities, but they had offended taste rather than morals.

> They talked nonsense without measure, were simple down to the lowest degree of silliness, and "babbled of green fields" enough to make men sicken of summer, but they were not daring enough to boast of impurity; there was no pestilent hatred of every thing generous, true, and honourable; no desperate licentiousness in their romance; no daring and fiend-like insult to feeling, moral ties, and Christian principle. They were foolish and profligate, but they did not deliver themselves, with the steady devotedness of an insensate and black ambition, to the ruin of society.

The implication was that Shelley and Keats had done, and had had, and had been all these things, in addition to their general imbecility.

From a burlesque of the tragic story of Keats, Maginn turned to the poem.

> . . . Locke says, that the most resolute liar cannot lie more than once in every three sentences. Folly is more engrossing; for we could prove, from the present Elegy, that it is possible to write two sentences of pure nonsense out of every three.

Maginn's master device was to catalogue whatever lines and phrases he could render ridiculous, and to point out their follies in a devastating running attack. The most ridiculous phrases from the first stanza were "Thaw not the frost"; "To mourn our loss"; "And teach them thine own sorrow, say with me Died Adonais"; "Till the future does Forget the past"; "An echo and a light."

> Here an hour — a dead hour too — is to say that Mr. J. Keats died **along with it!** yet this hour has the heavy business of mourning the loss of its **fellow-defunct,** and of rousing all its **obscure compeers** to be taught its own sorrow, &c. Mr. Shelley and his tribe have been panegyrized in their turn for power of language. . . . But any man may have the command of every word in the vocabulary, if he will fling them like pebbles from his sack; and even in the most fortuitous flinging, they will sometimes fall in pleasing though useless forms. The art of the modern Della Cruscan is thus to eject every epithet that he can conglomerate in his piracy through the lexicon, and throw them out to settle as they will. He follows his own rhymes [Maginn falsified one of Shelley's true rhymes in quoting the first stanza], and shapes his subject to the close of his measures. He is a glutton of all names of colours, and flowers, and smells, and tastes, and crowds his verse with scarlet, and blue, and yellow, and green; extracts tears from every thing, and makes moss and mud hold regular conversations with him. . . . On these principles, a hundred or a hundred thousand verses might be made, without taking the pen off the paper. The subject is indifferent to us.

Whereupon Maginn created a two-stanza parody upon **Adonais,** on the subject of Wontner, the city marshal, who was cruelly made to break his leg to provide a subject.

The Cenci also came in for its share of ridicule:

> The mingling of remorse, natural affection, woman's horror at murder, and alternate melancholy and fear at the prospect of the grave, in Percy Bysshe works up only this frigid rant: —
>
> > . . . How comes this hair undone?
> > Its wandering strings must be what blind me so,
> > And yet I **tied it fast! ! . . . .**
> >
> > The sunshine on the floor is **black!** The air
> > Is changed to vapours, such as the dead breathe
> > In charnel pits! Poh! I am choak'd! There creeps
> > A clinging, black, contaminating mist
> > About me — 'tis substantial, heavy, thick.
> > I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
> > My fingers and my limbs to one another,
> > And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
> > My flesh to a pollution, ' &c., &c.
>
> So much for the history of "Glue" — and so much easier is it to rake together the vulgar vocabulary of rottenness and reptilism, than to paint the workings of the mind.

Such a critic was equal to the demolition of any literature less "stiff and strong,

fixed in the letter" than mathematics or logic; the mildest comment that may be made is that Maginn seems to have forgotten the pathos of Lear's button.

Having disposed of Shelley's descriptive talents, the Irish cavalier advanced to a more serious accusation.

> But **Percy Bysshe** feels his hopelessness of poetic reputation, and therefore lifts himself upon the stilts of blasphemy. He is the only verseman of the day, who has dared, in a Christian country, to work out for himself the character of direct ATHEISM! In his present poem, he talks with impious folly of 'the **envious** wrath of man or God!' Of a
>
> 'Branded and ensanguined brow,
> Which was like **Cain's** or Christ's.'

And, in Maginn's opinion, even the defence of madness was lacking, for, while the poem had much of "poetic fustian," it had nothing of the "exuberance of insanity."

The review was finished off with an "Elegy on My Tomcat," sent him, the critic affirmed, by Shelley, which was "incomparably less nonsensical, verbose, and inflated, than Adonais; while it retains all its knowledge of nature, vigour of coloring, and felicity of language."*

By April of the following year Maginn had concluded, whether seriously or not it is hard to say, that the ends of charity would best be served by calling the "poetico-metaphysical maniac" and atheist a madman rather than a fool.†

Of Maginn's criticism little need be said. His method was parody; his aim, ridicule; his weapon, the perversion of phrase and detail. With an ulterior motive, he applied literal interpretation to poetic figures; he exhibited no qualities of a critic except intelligence and vehemence, and those were directed at the nadir of poetic justice. Occasionally he struck upon what was a real absurdity of poetic excess; and he was right about Shelley's disrespectful use of sacred terms, although far from perceiving the poet's distinction between the base concepts that were represented by the commonplace jargon of religion and the true spirituality of which **Adonais** gives such moving evidence. His reviews remind us of Johnson's objection to Milton's "blind mouths," carried to the last degree of cunning and vituperation.

It may have been Maginn who, in May, 1823, anatomized and exposed the hoax entitled **Letters on England, by Victoire, Count de Soligny.** The opinions of the fictitious Count were held up, by quotation, to especial ridicule. Of Shelley:

> **Count Tims laudeth the late Mr. Shelley**
>
> 'His imagination, — if it is at times self-willed and uncontrollable, and its creations are vague, misty, and indistinct even to itself, — is yet capable of reaching and sustaining itself at heights to which no other living poet has soared. And his power over poetical language is still more unrivalled: I have seen nothing like it in modern versification.'

Though the reviewer did not know it, the author of what he had correctly guessed was a fraud was Peter George Patmore, who was probably expressing some very sincere appreciation of Shelley under the shelter of his pseudonym.‡

In spite of the vituperative articles of Dr. Maginn, and an occasional carping footnote, the magazine's treatment of Shelley justified its pride not only in its professed receptivity to all genius, but also in its priority over the **Edinburgh Review** in according such recognition. In the seventh of the pseudonymous "Letters of Timothy Tickler, Esq.," on the subject of "the last number of the Edinburgh Review, and Things in General," a partisan of the **Magazine** administered a sulphuric rebuke to Jeffrey for his neglect of Shelley.

> Why, up to this blessed hour, has the Edinburgh Review never hinted that there has been such a man in the world as Percy Bysshe Shelley? Surely, surely his fancy and invention were in the proportion of 1000 to 1 compared with those of Johnny Keats. Surely, surely he was abused by the Quarterly fully as bitterly as ever Keats was. But no — there is a reason for everything. Shelley, with all his faults, was a gentleman, a scholar, and a poet; and his merits as such were uniformly acknowledged in Blackwood's Magazine. That work, if there was a cry against Shelley, did not join it. On the contrary, it was in that work that he was **first** praised in a style worthy of his genius; and, while many severe criticisms appeared there, of and concerning his bad principles, political and religious, there never appeared one word which Shelley, or the friends of Shelley, could complain of, as either illiberal or indecorous towards the man or

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* **The Odoherty Papers,** in **Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Dr. Maginn,** edited by Dr. Shelton Mackensie, Redfield, New York, 1855. Vol. II of the **Papers:** "Remarks on Shelley's Adonais." From **Blackwood's,** Dec. 1821.

† **Blackwood's,** April, 1822, Vol. XI: "Critique on Lord Byron," reprinted in the Mackensie edition.

‡ The **Letters,** published by Colburn in London in 1823, I have not seen. The **Dictionary of National Biography** does not list it among Patmore's works. For the authorship, see the **Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature,** by Halkett and Laing, Vol. III, p. 334.

towards the poet. In a word, the Edinburgh Review neglected his fine qualities, however obvious, and Blackwood praised them warmly and zealously, in spite of his bad qualities, however obvious. But it did not suit Mr. Jeffrey to allude to all this — Why? why simply because the object of this article was to denounce all the Tory critics, and Blackwood's in particular, as persons who bestow their praise or censure entirely on political grounds — who were incapable of doing justice to the fine fancy and powerful invention of Johnny Keats, and Leigh Hunt, King of the Cockneys, because these men were, or were supposed to be, politically opposed to their own principles. The least mention of Mr. Shelley's very different treatment must have at once nullified all this nonsense. It must, at the same time, have given birth to a universal inquiry as to the reasons which have from the beginning, and up to this moment, kept the Edinburgh Review silent as to Mr. Shelley himself, his poetry, and the evil and the good so strangely blended in all his extraordinary productions.*

Here and there a minor poet of **Blackwood's,** in the decade following Shelley's death, celebrated in verse the genius of his brilliant predecessor. Recognition of his "poetical" qualities was, perhaps, more prevalent than recognition of his message, but at least one memorial poem, contributed by "Harold," of "Templemore, Tipperary," eulogized him as prophet and martyr.

Remember here you meet no modish songs —
No courtly canto — languor-lulling lay —
Nor sounding sentiments from hollow tongues
That scoff the feelings they profess to sway:
Remember that a martyr's heart was broken
To prove the faith within this volume spoken

* * * *

The mild yet high Apostle! Ever strong,
In eloquence, which levin-like he hurl'd
Against those pyramids of Fraud and Wrong,
Whose lengthening shadows wither up the world!

* * * *

But the bright time approacheth that shall tell
If for man's weal he wore, with glorious pain
The prophet's robe and poet's wreath in vain.†

This was recognition of the reformer, rather than of the spiritualizing poet, but it signifies that at least the most obvious phase of Shelley's aim was intelligible to sympathetic readers of the period just after his death.

The policy of **Blackwood's** to publish work of a diverting and creative sort resulted, among other things, in the **Noctes Ambrosianae** of Christopher North and others. These were a series of spritely and philosophical dialogues on timely literary and journalistic subjects; several of the **dramatis personae** were modelled upon real characters of the **Blackwood's** circle. The best of the dialogues were the work of Wilson himself, and into these, in the midst of entertaining comments by his colleagues, he inserted passages which may be taken as expressive of serious critical views, immune from the more weighty responsibilities of essay-criticism by reason of their quasi-fictitious nature. Sport at the expense of the **Edinburgh Review** was a popular topic, and it was in this connection that Shelley was introduced into the conversation. The interesting character of Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, figured prominently in the discussion. Led on by North, he delivered a characteristic diatribe against Shelley's obscurity.

North. Of all schools of poetry and criticism, James, the most contemptible is the Oracular.

Shepherd. That's just what I was gaun to say . . .

North. The greatest sinner of the oracular school was Shelley — because the only true poet. True poets admire his genius, but, in spite of love and pity for the dead, they disdain the voluntary darkness in which he perversely dallied with things of light that should never have been so enshrouded, and according to the command and law of nature should have been wooed, won, wedded, and enjoyed in the face of heaven.

Shepherd. I consider mysel a man o' mair than ordinar genie, and of about an average understaunin; and ha'in paid sic attention to the principles o' poetry laid in the natur o' things, as ane canna weel avoid doin wha engages with life-warm and life-deep and life-lang luve in the practice o' the maist

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* **Blackwood's,** August, 1823, Vol. XIV, p. 227. See also the review of Hunt's **Lord Byron and His Contemporaries** in which Hunt was accused of alienating Shelley's affection for the **Magazine. Blackwood's,** March, 1828, Vol. XXIII, pp. 362-408.

† **Blackwood's,** Dec., 1833, Vol. XXXIV, p. 866. See also the issue for April, 1830, Vol. XXVII, p. 633.

heavenly delichtfu' o' a' the divine arts, I canna bring mysel to accuse mysel o' onything rash nor unreasonable-like in declarin that to be downricht drivellin nonsense, which, though expressed in words, and printed in gude teep, and on gude paper, in a byuck, either bund or in buirds, by day or by nicht, by coal, cawnle, lamp, or sunlicht, continues to lie afore me een in shoals o' unintelligible syllables o' which a' you can safely assert is, that they seem as if they belanged, however remotely, in some way or ither, to the English tongue.

North. Poor Shelley would turn on his face in his coffin — [A bit of dramatic pathos intervenes.]

Shepherd. But what was you gaun to say?

North. That the worst dishonour done to his memory is the admiration in which his genius is held by feebles, and fribbles, and coxcombs, and cockneys.

Tickler. And prigs.

Shepherd. And sumphs.

North. Their imitations of their oracle — who did indeed often utter glorious responses from a cloudy shrine all at once, and not transiently, illuminated from within by irrepressible native light — are better nonsense verses than I ever knew written by men of wit for a wager. For unconscious folly in its own peculiar walk, can far surpass the wildest extravagance of wit — perfect no-meaning can be perpetrated only by a natural numbskull, and is beyond the reach of art.*

Professor Wilson's fireside puppet show professed, apparently, only light entertainment, and not profound criticisms. If he was the author of the preceding reviews, we know that he acknowledged no such bafflement among the obscurities of Shelley as that which confronted the simple intellect of the oratorical Ettrick Shepherd. North's personal contribution may be taken as an admission that he had found himself blinded at times by "an excess of light"; but it is more likely that his quarrel was with the allegorical difficulty of the poems. The Shepherd's attitude is self-explanatory, or at least occupies enough space to be so. Both join cry against the shallow admiration and imitation of the Oracle. The literary form here used may be regarded as a whimsical Socratic dialogue, with purpose diverting rather than instructive — a coffee-house essay in nineteenth century language.

It was perhaps with his work as a translator that Shelley's early critics quarrelled least. By the end of the period between 1822 and 1840 his reputation as a distinguished poet of the century was in a measure established, and the very technical excellence which his detractors hastened to admit served him notably in the work of translation. In 1840 seven translations of **Faust** were reviewed in **Blackwood's,** and Shelley's, although it was not one of the seven, was taken as a basis of discussion. But where religion or policy or morality could make no issue, pedantry could. The criterion of this reviewer was extreme literal fidelity to the original; however, he was not oblivious of fidelity to the spirit. After a quotation from the ode of the three archangels, in Shelley's version, there followed a number of minute objections to its diction, idiom, and lack of spiritual verisimilitude. For example, the reviewer stated that Shelley's interpolation of the word "even" in a certain line, the word having no counterpart in the original,

> would, of itself, be sufficient to sink the whole version down into Tartarus, **even** though the rest of it were really steeped in the richest melody that ever flowed from angelic lips. . . However, "the world's **unwithered countenance** is bright as at [sic] creation's day," fully makes amends for it, and strikes us as extremely beautiful, though very different from the words of the original.†

In the absence of the proverbially elusive criterion for judging translations of verse, a worse standard might have been chosen; and such comparison as was made here is textual criticism, if not appreciation. In consideration, however, of Shelley's few errors of textual infidelity, a fuller appreciation of the general effect and merit of his version would have been pleasingly appropriate.

By all means the most solid and thoughtful treatment of Shelley published in **Blackwood's** during this period was that contained in an essay entitled "Wordsworth," which appeared early in 1841. This was a studied and unjournalistic leading article, lacking most of the partisan elements of the reviews: a generalized study of the meaning of Shelley and his work, and an attempt to look below the superficial qualities of technical brilliance and iconoclastic violence at the nature and thought of

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* **Noctes Ambrosianae,** by Professor Wilson. Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London. Preface signed 1855. Four vols. Vol. IV, pp. 109-110. From **Blackwood's,** August, 1834, Vol. XXXV.

† **Blackwood's,** February, 1840, Vol. XLVII, pp. 223-240, p. 230.

the poet. Specifically, it differed from the earlier reviews in taking a more general view of the poet and in refraining, for the most part, from comment upon individual works. Likewise it approached more nearly to the higher functions of criticism in that it avoided passion, both moralistic and journalistic, and in that it sought to formulate a truthful and thoughtful generalized conclusion.

Its first contribution was a truthful and ingenious statement of the essentially subjective nature of the great Romantic poets, omitting Keats.

> Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, have it in common that their verse is an exposition of themselves; their own self-inflicted agitation, or well-earned tranquillity. It is not a picture of the world, dramatically drawn, which they present to us; but constantly the picture as seen through the medium of their personal feelings and convictions. And how widely different in some of them was this medium! To all the band, as to all thinking men, this life presents itself as a vision in great part painful and unintelligible; but the manner, how diverse, in which they encounter the eternal perplexity! Byron wars against the world with vain and self-destructive violence; Shelley would madly create a new world with man the god of it; Wordsworth clung to the old remedy, a great patience and a trust in heaven.*

For comparison with Wordsworth, Shelley was thought more suitable than Byron, inasmuch as he was distinguished by "a more subtle and metaphysical cast of thought." The persistent ideas of Shelley were regarded, not as indicating by their impracticable nature an intellectual deficiency, but as providing the far more remarkable spectacle of a mind which would or could not arrive at "common sense."

> It is worthy of our study the intellectual character of Shelley. How it could support itself for so long a time, and live on from year to year, and in work after work, is a perplexity. That the combination it presents should exist as a dream of youthful and untempered genius, is not, perhaps, surprising; but how daylight could be so long kept out, how the light of common sense could be so systematically excluded from a mind of so great power, is, as I have said, a marvel, if anything in the history of human minds may be considered as such. The tone and temper of his writings did indeed improve, and we should do injustice to him if we remembered his name in connection only with an early production, whose angry ravings were as violent an outrage to the tolerant spirit of philosophy, as on the zealous feelings of religion. But though the manner in which he developed his opinions greatly improved, the opinions themselves retained their extravagance to the last.

The most startling of Shelley's ideas, as represented by the essayist, was his alleged conception of the identity of the creative mind of the universe with his own.

> There is a daring subtlety of thought — **horresco referens** — wherein the thinker . . . . comes to suspect that that **intelligence** manifest in the visible world and which we all point to as proof of the existence of the creative mind, is but, in fact, a reflection of his own mind . . . . This metaphysical delusion . . . had taken complete possession of Shelley; he saw in the mirror of nature the reflection only of the human mind.

While this view might readily be inferred from the authoritative tone of the poet's apocalyptic works on human emancipation, it was certainly not correct, and might easily have been avoided by a writer familiar with the poet's philosophical prose. The view of the pervading Intelligence of the Universe was, in fact, the antithesis of the anthropomorphic concept, which Shelley was forever combatting as a degraded and degrading fallacy of established religion. He believed that all minds were parts of the universal mind, but he was careful to deny just what the essayist here asserted of him. "Let it not be supposed," wrote Shelley, "that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it."† Similarly in the "Essay on Christianity" he wrote:

> We live and move and think; but we are not the creators of our own origin and existence. We are not the arbiters of every motion of our own complicated nature; we are not the masters of our own imaginations and moods of mental being. There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will.‡

Except for his failure to realize that the race of perfect men and women in Shelley's ideal poems represented the same old race, idealized only through the expression

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* **Blackwood's,** March, 1841, Vol. XLIX, pp. 359-371. P. 360.

† Essay "On Life," p. 56 of **Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism,** London, Frowde, 1909.

‡ Essay "On Christianity," p. 90 of **Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism,** London, Frowde, 1909.

of its own noble endowment of perfectible qualities, the writer's following statement of the poet's philosophy was generally correct, if unsympathetic:

> There was for him, then, nothing to contemplate, but material object and man. Now, the mind of the poet was instinct with impassioned sentiments; it must find something for its admiration, for its homage, for its hope, and love, and aspiration. . . . Shelley, therefore, conjured up a phantom race of mankind; refined, idealized, worthy to occupy the democratic level of his new revolutionized universe. How the transformation was to be effected of our common human nature into this phantom humanity, he has not told us; it was not, perhaps, the business of a poet to explain. All that we hear is, that some fine morning our evil passions — all that is gross and selfish, all that is harsh, miserable, and ungainly in form and feature, as well as mental disposition, will fly off like hideous masks that had hitherto concealed our natural beauty, and vanish for ever in mid air.

The unreason of this transformation, however, should have been partly resolved by the poet's assignment of it to the innate nobility of man's otherwise imperfect nature, and the miracle might thus have seemed to the critic not totally unexplained, if none the less miraculous.

> The poet thus stood in twofold opposition to mankind. He had declared himself the antagonist to all that men esteem highest in truth and goodness; and he was also in perpetual hostility to the world, because there was nothing in it good enough. He overthrew its virtues: he made no alliance with its vices.*

This statement conveyed flatly the prevalent conventional conception upon which Shelley's doom was pronounced: the unquestioning belief that all the "highest in truth and goodness" was identical with the social organs which professed it. Shelley opposed, not that highest goodness, but the institutions which, while professing it, seemed to him to contradict and violate it in all practice and to block the passage toward it of men's minds. In so doing, he opposed much that was morally fallacious in the social fabric and something that was good; but to his thoughtful readers he seemed to threaten the pillars of church and state and nation with blasphemous and fanatic nihilism.

If his critics failed to see, or deposed as invalid, his panacea of perfectibility, they missed also his force and authenticity as a social philosopher. Lacking his faith and intuition, they thought of him as lacking their common sense. Thus they relegated him to the Parnassus of "poesy," which is the Limbo of thought. The soundness of his philosophy is no conclusive proof of the soundness of his poetic vision, if they both are judged by the single standard of mundane efficacy. But through the philosopher we have come to understand that the poet was no empty visionary; by his prose we have learned the better to follow the flight of his poetry. The **Blackwood's** essayist's criterion of human interest and common sense left of Shelley's inspired prophecy mere gossamer of fancy.

> Such was the philosophy, if by this name it is to be called, of Shelley. Such the subtle, eccentric thought which, united with a fervid imagination, composed the mazy, brilliant, bewildering strain of his poetry. These dark errors, these bright impossibilities, beset him always. On the sober realities of life he sets no value. Our Gothic virtues have no charm for him. The past history of mankind is a wasted existence, and our present condition is no more than the scaffolding to the pile which is yet to be erected. He never sees the homely earth we tread upon. He throws all his colors on the cloud, and the mist before him receives a glittering bow of promise, but most unhallowed and unauthorized. His phantom world engrosses him entirely. A long poem, **The Revolt of Islam,** consisting of many cantos, is but the interminable reproduction of the same few ideas from which it seems that he cannot possibly extricate himself. He presents us with a new blaze of diction at each stanza, but with the old repeated thought; reminding us of that species of firework where fresh flame is seen to rush perpetually from a hundred jets, but the same solitary world stands blazing, unchanged, before us. Yet has Shelley poetic merit, if no other — visions how very lucid and ethereal! — a diction how bright and exuberant! — a line how wildly musical! Indeed the effect of his poetry is more like beautiful music than anything else. We hang over the verse as over a passionate melody; it fills the mind, while it lasts, with sense as of a deep meaning and earnest sentiment; when it drops from the ear, it may happen that the meaning drops with it.†

Blackwood's had dealt honestly — indeed with a strained and yearning honesty — with Shelley. It had supported him against the neglect of the **Edinburgh**; it had made of him the shining instance of its generosity toward all genius; but, being

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* **Blackwood's,** March, 1841, Vol. XLIX, p. 370.
† Ibid., p. 371.

English and level-headed, it could not share his iconoclastic dream. That dream, as we have seen, was not always understood; the subtler aspect of the poet's aim was often missed; and when this was in a measure understood, it suffered condemnation by the application of a standard of judgment the very opposite of that by which the merely **poetic** genius of its author was exalted. **Blackwood's** contributed to the commentary reviews, poetic memorials, parody criticism, and thoughtful retrospective essays; and the judgment of all save Maginn was, in effect, "How ill a theme — how beautifully expressed!"*

In spite of the repeated rebukes of **Blackwood's,** the austere Whig dictatorship of the **Edinburgh Review** was for a long time silent as to Shelley. It is significant that its editor, Francis Jeffrey, although he had almost complete control of the department of literature in his review until the advent of Macaulay in 1825, and although he was uttering copious reviews in those very years when Shelley's career reached its creative climax, should have been thus silent.† In the **Review,** for January, 1825, he had written,

> It is a proud thing indeed for England, for poetry, and for mankind, that all the illustrious poets of the present day — Byron, Moore, Rogers, Campbell — are distinguished by their zeal for freedom.‡

No Shelley. And yet he could hardly have been relegated to that group of bards, mentioned by Jeffrey, whose harpstrings were broken because they had deserted the sacred cause of liberty.

Yet Jeffrey did confer upon Shelley the brief notice of two words of praise and an epitaph. In his review of Edwin Atherstone's **The Fall of Nineveh,** he wrote:

> Three poets of great promise have indeed been lost, "in the morn and liquid dew of their youth" — in Kirke White, in Keats, and in Pollok; and a powerful, though more uncertain genius extinguished, less prematurely, in Shelley.**

His consolation was that the elegance of Mrs. Hemans and the "classical copiousness" of Milman remained to England's glory.

His famous and pessimistic summary of England's Parnassus, at the end of his editorial career, is interesting because of more than the reference to Shelley. It was written in the twilight of the bards.

> Since the beginning of our critical career we have seen a vast deal of poetry pass into oblivion, in spite of our feeble efforts to recall or retain it in remembrance. The tuneful quartos of Southey are already little better than lumber; and the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley, and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth, and the plebian pathos of Crabbe, are melting fast from the field of our vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry. Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness; except where they have been married to immortal music; and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride. We need say nothing of Milman, and Croly, and Atherstone, and Hood, and a legion of others, who, with no ordinary gifts of taste and fancy, have not so properly survived their fames, as been excluded by some hard fatality from their just inheritance. The two who have the longest withstood this rapid withering of the laurel, and with the least marks of decay on their branches, are Rogers and Campbell . . . .††

One is tempted to say that it was a dilettante period in criticism, halcyon days for the essayists who were prone to blink at the gilded lyre with childish ecstasy rather than to weigh the sibylline words of the prophetic bard, when the chief arbiter of poetry could thus neglect the most searching prophet, if not the greatest artist, among those poets whose genius merited review.

But five years after the access of Macaulay, this greater master of critical utterance was to make a most ingenious comparison of Shelley with a man in many ways his utter antithesis: John Bunyan.

> Bunyan is almost the only writer who ever gave to the abstract the interest of the concrete. In the works of many celebrated authors, men are

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* For a brief, chiefly undocumented, summary of the critical positions of the time, see the Introduction of Solve's **Shelley: His Theory of Poetry.** For an account of **Blackwood's** kindly treatment of Shelley, see Wilson's summary of its services to young genius: **Blackwood's** Preface for Jan. 1826.

† Cf. Oliver Elton's **Survey of English Literature,** Vol. I, Ch. XIII.

‡ Reprinted in Jeffrey's **Essays on English Poets and Poetry,** from the **Edinburgh Review,** London, Routledge, n. d., New Universal Library, p. 218.

** **Edinburgh Review,** Sept. 1828, Vol. 48, p. 48.

†† **Essays on English Poets,** p. 590, **Edinburgh Review,** October, 1829, Vol. 50, American edition.

merely personifications. We have not a jealous man, but jealousy; not a traitor, but perfidy; not a patriot, but patriotism. The mind of Bunyan, on the contrary, was so imaginative that personifications, when he dealt with them, became men. A dialogue between two qualities in his dream, has more dramatic effect than a dialogue between two human beings in most plays. In this respect the genius of Bunyan bore a great resemblance to that of a man who had very little else in common with him, Percy Bysshe Shelley. The strong imagination of Shelley made him an idolater in his own despite. Out of the most indefinite terms of a hard, cold, dark, metaphysical system, he made a gorgeous Pantheon, full of beautiful, majestic, and life-like forms. He turned atheism itself into a mythology, rich with visions as glorious as the gods that live in the marble of Phidias, or the virgin saints that smile on us from the canvass of Murillo. The Spirit of Beauty, the Principle of Good, the Principle of Evil, when he treated of them, ceased to be abstractions. They took shape and colour. They were no longer mere words; but "intelligible forms"; "fair humanities"; objects of love, of adoration, or of fear. As there can be no stronger sign of a mind destitute of the poetical faculty than that tendency which was so common among the writers of the French school to turn images into abstractions, Venus, for example, into Love, Minerva into Wisdom, Mars into War, and Bacchus into Festivity, so there can be no stronger sign of a mind truly poetical than a disposition to reverse this abstracting process, and to make individuals out of generalities. Some of the metaphysical and ethical theories of Shelley were certainly most absurd and pernicious. But we doubt whether any modern poet has possessed in an equal degree some of the highest qualities of the great ancient masters. The words bard and inspiration, which seem so cold and affected when applied to other modern writers, have a perfect propriety when applied to him. He was not an author, but a bard. His poetry seems not to have been an art, but an inspiration. Had he lived to the full age of man, he might not improbably have given to the world some great work of the very highest rank in design and execution.*

This incidental interpretation was long to be quoted, and many a later critic busied himself with discovering those qualities of the "great ancient masters" which Macaulay thought that Shelley had possessed. Macaulay disagreed with some of Shelley's principles, but here, as in the case of the bardic qualities, he refrained from specification. Thus, he did not concern himself with Shelley's primary role as prophet and social philosopher, but with his secondary capacity as poetic artist. He regarded Shelley as a poet of promise rather than of finished performance, and in this, with respect to the qualities of Shelley's longer poems as art, he was, in general, correct. His comment is a tribute to the pictorial and moving reality of Shelley's symbolic characters, and constitutes a convincing contradiction of those readers who found Shelley's imagery unreal and ineffectual. It may be inferred that those doctrines with which Macaulay had disagreed he had received from the poetry itself, rather than from biographical sources. His conclusions were prudently indeterminate; his method was that of suggestive generalization; his views were such as, by reason of their indefinite formulation, it would be difficult to quarrel with. It is indicative of a just critical method that they seem to have been drawn from personal response to the poet's works. His few words about the ancients seem to have provided the cue for many later comparisons of Shelley with the greater Grecian masters.

Of Hazlitt, perhaps the greatest critic of the early part of the century, a part of whose comments upon Shelley likewise appeared in the **Edinburgh Review,** it was written that he

> had little inclination to talk or write about contemporary authors, and still less to read them . . . . Coleridge and Wordsworth were not modern to him . . . . With the exception of the works of these, and of his friends Barry Cornwall and Sheridan Knowles . . . he held modern literature in slight esteem.†

Saintsbury, who thought him at times a greater critic than Coleridge, considered him best in dealing, affectively, with individual authors or single works. At the same time, he convicted Hazlitt of a "sort of audacious sciolism" — a complacent ignorance of many things, which, had he known them, would have enriched his critical writings most notably.‡ This unblushing and uninhibiting ignorance, it may justly be supposed, affected Hazlitt's estimate of Shelley the man, stated in the **Table Talk**

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* "John Bunyan," a review of Southey's edition of **The Pilgrim's Progress,** in the **Edinburgh Review,** December, 1830, Vol. 52. Quoted from the eight-volume edition of **The Works of Lord Macaulay,** edited by Lady Trevelyan, London, Longmans, Green, 1875, Vol. V, pp. 449-450. Cf. Stopford Brooke on Shelley's myth-making faculty, **Studies in Poetry,** London, Duckworth, 1910.

† **Literary Sketches and Letters; being the Final Memorials of Charles Lamb.** T. N. Talfourd. New York, Appleton, 1849, pp. 222-223.

‡ **Ibid.,** p. 252.

essay; his review of the **Posthumous Poems** was necessarily better informed.* Saintsbury suggested also that other even less wholesome influences affected his views of his young contemporary.†

It was the unfavorable estimate of Shelley expressed in the **Table Talk** essay "On Paradox and Commonplace" which led to hostility between Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt in 1821.‡ The essence of this essay lay in the eloquently elaborated distinction between two types of mind, of one of which Shelley was used as paramount example. These two mental and temperamental types, as Hazlitt thought, account for two prevalent attitudes of mind, to one or the other of which most individuals conform.

> The greatest number of minds seem utterly incapable of fixing on any conclusion, except from the pressure of custom and authority; opposed to these, there is another class less numerous but pretty formidable, who in all their opinions are equally under the influence of novelty and restless vanity . . . . With one sort, example, authority, fashion, ease, interest, rule all: with the other, singularity, the love of distinction, mere whim, the throwing off all restraint and showing an heroic disregard of consequences, an impatient and unsettled turn of mind, the want of sudden and strong excitement, of some new plaything for the imagination, are equally "lords of the ascendant," and are at every step getting the start of reason, truth, nature, common sense and feeling. With one party, whatever is, is right; with their antagonists, whatever is, is wrong. . . . One set, wrapped up in impenetrable forms and technical traditions, are deaf to everything that has not been dinned in their ears, and in those of their forefathers, from time immemorial . . . the others pique themselves on a jargon of their own, a Babylonish dialect, crude, unconcocted, harsh, discordant, to which it is impossible for any one else to attach either meaning or respect . . . . The credulous bigot shudders at the idea of altering anything in 'time-hallowed' institutions. . . . The more refined sceptic will laugh in your face at the idea of retaining any thing which has the damning stamp of custom upon it, and is for abating all former precedents, "all trivial, fond records," the whole frame and fabric of society as a nuisance in the lump. . . . The one is the slave of habit, the other is the sport of caprice. The first is like a man obstinately bed-rid: the last is troubled with St. Vitus's dance.**

The application of this theory to Shelley was something less than perfectly just. The view that he was moved by vanity and love of spectacular display, a view which other writers of the time shared with Hazlitt, was certainly erroneous; the poet's views were troublesome enough, however, and it was probably hard to believe that he had become thus notorious through sheer sincerity. The belief that he was one of those constitutional rebels who attacked the orthodox because it was the orthodox was probably in part correct; the **sincerity** of the negation which instituted that rebellion, and which may have thus resulted in damning the innocent along with the guilty among the social institutions condemned, was neglected by Hazlitt, in his absorption in his theory of the constitutionally rebellious.

> The author of the Prometheus Unbound (to take an individual instance of the last character) has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic. . . . The shock of accident, the weight of authority make no impression on his opinions, which retire like a feather, or rise from the encounter unhurt, through their own buoyancy. He is clogged by no dull system of realities, no earth-bound feelings, no rooted prejudices, by nothing that belongs to the mighty trunk and hard husk of nature and habit, but is drawn up by irresistible levity to the regions of mere speculation and fancy, to the sphere of air and fire, where his delighted spirit floats in "seas of pearl and clouds of amber." . . . Curiosity is the only proper category of his mind, and though a man in knowledge, he is a child in feeling. Hence he puts everything into a metaphysical crucible to judge of it himself and exhibit it to others as a subject of interesting experiment, without first making it over to the ordeal of his common sense or trying it on his heart. . . . Mr. Shelley has been accused of vanity — I think he is chargeable with extreme levity; but this levity is so great, that I do not believe he is sensible of its consequences. He strives to overturn all established creeds and systems: but this is in him an effect of constitution. He runs before the most extravagant opinions, but this is because he is held back by none of

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* "As for Shelley's poetry, P. G. Patmore suggests that Hazlitt knew little or nothing of it. 'Though I have often,' he says (**My Friends and Acquaintances,** iii, 136), 'heard him speak disparagingly of Shelley as a poet, I never heard him refer to a single line or passage of his published writings.' " — **The Collected Works of William Hazlitt,** edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, London, Dent, 1904. Twelve volumes. Vol. 10, p. 428. Editor's note.

† "But Shelley was a contemporary, something of an acquaintance, a man of some means, a gentleman — so Hazlitt must snarl at him." Saintsbury's **History of Criticism,** Vol. III, p. 260.

‡ See **Collected Works,** Vol. 10, p. 428.

** **Collected Works,** Vol. 6, pp. 147-148.

the merely mechanical checks of sympathy and habit. He tampers with all sorts of obnoxious subjects, but it is less because he is gratified with the frankness of the taint, than captivated with the intellectual phosphoric light they emit. It would seem that he wished not so much to convince or inform as to shock the public by the tenor of his productions, but I suspect he is more intent upon startling himself with his electrical experiments in morals and philosophy; and though they may scorch other people, they are to him harmless amusements, the coruscations of an Aurora Borealis, that "play round the head, but do not reach the heart." Still I could wish that he would put a stop to the incessant, alarming whirl of his Voltaic battery. With his zeal, his talent, and his fancy, he would do more good and less harm, if he were to give up his wilder theories, and if he took less pleasure in feeling his heart flutter in unison with the panic-struck apprehensions of his readers.*

With this illustration of his thesis, Hazlitt returned to the consideration of the genus of paradox-hunters, having gathered force for his anathema from the example of Shelley.

> Persons of this class, instead of consolidating useful and acknowledged truths, and thus advancing the cause of science and virtue, are never easy but in raising doubtful and disagreeable questions, which bring the former into disgrace and discredit. They are not contented to lead the minds of men to an eminence overlooking the prospect of social amelioration, unless, by forcing them up slippery paths and to the utmost verge of possibility, they can dash them down the precipice the instant they reach the promised Pisgah. They do not mind making their principles odious, provided they can make themselves notorious. To win over the public opinion by fair means is to them an insipid, common-place mode of popularity: they would either force it by harsh methods, or seduce it by intoxicating potions. . . . Any thing new, any thing remote, any thing questionable, comes to them in a shape that is sure of a cordial welcome. . . . The practical is with them always the antipodes of the ideal: and like other visionaries of a different stamp, they date the Millennium or New Order of Things from the Restoration of the Bourbons. . . . Of all people the most tormenting are those who bid you hope in the midst of despair, who, by never caring about any thing but their own sanguine, hair-brained Utopian schemes, have at no time any particular cause of embarrassment and despondency because they have never the least chance of success, and who by including whatever does not hit their idle fancy, kings, priests, religion, government, public abuses or private morals, in the same sweeping clause of ban and athema, do all they can to combine all parties in a common cause against them, and to prevent every one else from advancing one step farther in the career of practical improvement than they do in that of imaginary and unattainable perfection.†

Thus, Hazlitt's professed method consisted in the illustration of a theory of mental types by the use of Shelley as an example. It is obvious, however, not only that it was intended to illuminate the instance by means of the theory, but that the hypothesis was derived from the contemplation of the example and was designed to stand as a damnatory conclusion upon the individual mind in question. The attention is concentrated upon Shelley, not upon the thesis. He is no casual illustration. The effect was to have been to condemn his type of mind as obnoxious and antisocial, his art as vain and affected, and his motive as egotistic temperamentalism rather than constructive thought.

His conclusions were that Shelley was emotionally and temperamentally rebellious; that he opposed the established order because it was established; that he sought vain notoriety and the creation of public (and private) astonishment rather than reformation; that he tampered in a childishly imaginative fashion with themes the most serious, vital, and sacred; that he lacked the rational balance of thought; that he impeded social amelioration by deceiving public hope; and that he neglected the propagation of acknowledged truth. To these we know that it now may be replied, first, that this career of rebellion, while emotional and temperamental in its **expression,** had its **source** in a well-founded sense of social wrong, and in obvious more than in imaginary abuses; second, that Shelley sought occasionally to startle only that he might enlighten;‡ third, that his handling of vital questions, though idealized at times to the point of apparent unreality, was founded upon a steadfast faith and a passionate and sincere philanthropy; fourth, that the poet was a capable thinker, whose conclusions might seem empty of meaning only because they transcended the commonplace and were couched in the language of abstract imagination rather than of logic; fifth, that his early destructive violence was in a measure outweighed by his maturer idealism, and that he refrained from the proposal in his poetry of deceptive panaceas; and finally, that the truth which he sought to propagate, so far from being **acknowledged,** was the prophetic and intuitive revelation of a social ideal

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* Ibid., pp. 148-149.
† Ibid., pp. 149-150.
‡ Cf. Trelawney, Ch. III.

the more precious because of its very remoteness from contemporary thought.

Hazlitt's review, "Shelley's Posthumous Poems," appeared in the **Edinburgh Review** for July, 1824.* There is in it the accuracy of more than logical exactness, the penetrating logic of genius, even when the writer seems most in error about Shelley. Hazlitt's prose here, in spite of the fact that it seemed to the axe-grinding Maginn to obscure truth and meaning in "volumes of smoke" and "sparkles of fire, from the cloudy tabernacle of his thought," takes on color and rhythm and becomes in itself a sort of enthralling eloquence, a poetry of intellectual and yet imaginative prose.

> Mr. Shelley's style is to poetry what astrology is to natural science — a passionate dream, a straining after impossibilities, a record of fond conjectures, a confused embodying of vague abstractions, — a fever of the soul, thirsting and craving after what it cannot have, indulging its love of power and novelty at the expense of truth and nature, associating ideas by contraries, and wasting great powers by their application to unattainable objects.

The philosophical bent of Shelley's poetry and its failure to employ the imagery and themes of human interest and of familiar romantic and realistic experience were interpreted, the one as conducting to obscurity and the inane, the other as the ethereal conceit of a cloud-riding coxcomb.

> Poetry, we grant, creates a world of its own; but it creates it out of existing materials. . . . in him, fancy, will, caprice, predominated over and absorbed the natural influences of things; and he had no respect for any poetry that did not strain the intellect as well as fire the imagination — and was not sublimed into a high spirit of metaphysical philosophy. Instead of giving a language to thought, or lending the heart a tongue, he utters dark sayings, and deals in allegories and riddles. . . . Mr. Shelley's mind . . . soared . . . to the strange, the improbable, and the impossible. He mistook the nature of the poet's calling, which should be guided by involuntary, not by voluntary impulses. He shook off, as a heroic and praise-worthy act, the trammels of sense, custom, and sympathy, and became the creature of his own will. He was "all air," disdaining the bars and ties of mortal mould. He ransacked his brain for incongruities, and believed in whatever was incredible. Almost all is effort, almost all is extravagant, almost all is quaint, incomprehensible, and abortive, from aiming to be more than it is. Epithets are applied, because they do not fit; subjects are chosen, because they are repulsive: the colours of his style, for their gaudy, changeful, startling effect, resemble the display of fireworks in the dark, and, like them, have neither durability, nor keeping, nor discriminate form. . . . Spurning the world of realities, he rushed into the world of nonentities and contingencies, like air into a **vacuum.** If a thing was old and established, this was with him a certain proof of its having no solid foundation to rest upon: if it was new, it was good and right. Every paradox was to him a self-evident truth; every prejudice an undoubted absurdity. . . . Whatever shocked the feelings of others, conciliated his regard; whatever was light, extravagant, and vain, was to him a proportionable relief from the dullness and stupidity of established opinions. . . . The principles of sound morality, liberty and humanity, are not to be found only in a few recent writers, who have discovered the secret of the greatest happiness to the greatest numbers, but are truths as old as the creation. To be convinced of the existence of wrong, we should read history rather than poetry; the levers with which we must work out our regeneration are not the cobwebs of the brain, but the warm palpitating fibres of the human heart. It is the collision of passions and interests, the petulance of party spirit, and the perversities of self-will and self-opinion that have been the great obstacles to social improvement — not stupidity or ignorance. . . .

It was Hazlitt's judgment that Shelley, by mingling truth, error, and scepticism, had set both the righteous and the unrighteous against him and against the cause of social progress. But Shelley himself would have agreed with some of the latter sentences. Shelley did neglect history, but he took his knowledge of evil from more immediate sources; and except in his earliest days of materialistic dogma he would not have held that reformation might come about by mind alone.

> . . . . He makes no account of the opinions of others, or the consequences of any of his own; but proceeds — tasking his reason to the utmost to account for everything, and discarding everything as mystery and error for which he cannot account by an effort of mere intelligence — measuring man, providence, nature, and even his own heart, by the limits of the understanding — now hallowing high mysteries, now desecrating pure sentiments, according as they fall in with or exceed those limits; and exalting and purifying, with Promethean heat, whatever he does not confound and debase.

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* Reprinted in the **Collected Works,** Vol. 10, pp. 256-275.

Of the poems themselves, he thought **Julian and Maddalo**

> full of that thoughtful and romantic humanity, but rendered perplexed and unattractive by that veil of shadowy or of glittering obscurity, which distinguished Mr. Shelley's writings.

He concluded from it that the poet's color sense was better than his sense for form, and thought the versification not likely to please all readers, though reminiscent of Crabbe and Wordsworth. The poem was judged to be in Shelley's best style, being less confused and extravagant, if less brilliant, than his others. Such mysteries as the **Witch of Atlas,** the **Triumph of Life,** and **Marianne's Dream** he thought confused, rhapsodic, and of horrid content, baffling both ordinary understanding and the skill of the critic. The **Witch** he preferred to the **Triumph,** as being less "dreary and lamentable." Because he had already misjudged Shelley, the **Witch** seemed a curious anomaly:

> Indeed it is curious to remark every where the proneness to the marvellous and supernatural, in one who so resolutely set his face against every received mystery, and all traditional faith. Mr. Shelley must have possessed, in spite of all his obnoxious and indiscreet scepticism, a large share of credulity and wondering curiosity in his composition, which he reserved from common use, and bestowed upon his own inventions and picturesque caricatures. To every other species of imposture he was inexorable; and indeed it is only his antipathy to established creeds and legitimate crowns that ever tears the veil from his **ideal** idolatries, and renders him clear and explicit.

In the **Ode to Naples** Hazlitt found a genuine and praise-worthy aspiration. He quoted the poem as "a fair specimen of Mr. Shelley's highest powers — whose eager animation wanted only a greater sternness and solidity to be sublime."

Perhaps the best thing in the review was Hazlitt's warning against the besetting vice of romantic excess.

> We are too much subject to these voluntary inflictions, these "moods of mind," these effusions of "weakness and melancholy," in the perusal of modern poetry. It has shuffled off, no doubt, its old pedantry and formality; but has at the same time lost all shape or purpose, except that of giving vent to some morbid feeling of the moment. . . . We are no longer annoyed at seeing the luxuriant growth of nature and fancy clipped into armchairs and peacocks' tails; but there is danger of having its stately products choked wih unchecked underwood, or weighted down with gloomy nightshade, or eaten up with personality, like ivy clinging round and eating into the sturdy oak.

This was a plea for the wholesome restraint without which not even Romantic art could show to its best advantage, the lack of which he thought in a measure responsible for elements of misdirected rebellion, morbid personality, and allegorical obscurantism in Shelley. Shelley was thus recognized as of the "modern" school, and was here offered one of the sterling principles of the old as an emotional sedative.

Hazlitt's most nearly unmingled praise was naturally bestowed upon the translations from Goethe, Euripides, and Calderon.

> If the present publication contained only the two last pieces in it, the **Prologue in Heaven** and the **May-day Night** of the Faust, . . . the intellectual world would receive it with an **All Hail!**

From the **May-day Night** he quoted at length, and compared the translation most favorably with that of Lord Leveson Gower. Whereupon, drifting off on the wings of the Faust legend, he concluded the essay with a quoted passage in description of Marlowe's **Life and Death of Dr. Faustus.**

Hazlitt is more difficult to summarize than the pedestrian critics. We have already indicated his method in the **Table Talk** essay, and enumerated his charges against Shelley and the answers or qualifications which should be made to them. There he was dealing with Shelley as a mental type, with no specific references to the poetry. In the later review, maintaining the same essential position, he applied himself to the poems of the posthumous volume. Unfortunately this did not include the earlier-published major works of Shelley, and we are robbed of specific comment upon them. Hazlitt's conclusions about the poet's general qualities and meaning, therefore, are more significant than his brief comments upon the poems in the last separate volume. These conclusions, written or implied in one or the other essay, or in both, may be indicated as an addition to the summary already made of the first of those writings.

In the first place, Hazlitt mistook the motive behind Shelley's poetry. He thought him overpowered by vain ambition and the passion for unearthly and spectacular novelty, with "too little deference for the opinions of others, too little sympathy for their feelings." The poet seemed to him to be moved by an aspiration illegitimate because excessive, which discarded the good within reach for that beyond, which was visionary and impossible. He did not fully comprehend Shelley's overmastering desire to elevate men by imaginative appeal, where he had failed to reform them through direct social correction; he did justly and wisely rebuke the poet's excesses both of iconoclastic zeal and chaotic remoteness.

Then, marking the use by Shelley of materials justly to be considered abstract, he

mistook the relationship between the abstract poetry and its concrete goal. He feared the destructive power of the bard, but separated his motive and end from the pragmatical reality which is always the goal of the prophet of social rehabilitation. Religion, one might say, is abstract and metaphysical, but it is aimed at practical results in the formation of a way of life. Hazlitt did not so much judge the efficacy of the poetry in achieving this end as he failed to see in it the presence of a sanely constructive purpose. And this is true in spite of the fact that he was more concerned with the meaning of the poetry than with the art or the genius of execution with which its author was endowed.

Thus, little or nothing was said specifically about the qualities of Shelley as an artist, while the functioning of his impatient genius was represented chiefly in the eloquent exaggeration of its faults by a critic whose heart was with the more sedate and earthly elders of English verse.

This review of the **Posthumous Poems** provided Dr. Maginn of **Blackwood's** with further opportunity for pyrotechnical display. Thinking, or pretending to think, that the article had been written by Barry Cornwall, he fell upon it with a storm of dramatic fury calculated to rend both the critic and his already maltreated victim.

> "Mr. Shelley," you tell us, "is the **maker** of his own poetry out of nothing." If it were so, he would be a creator in good earnest, but unluckily it happens not to be the case. The materials of Shelley's poetry existed as much as those of any other poet in the world. He imposed on you and other profound and original thinkers like you, nonsense for sublimity, but in his most ultra-mundane flight, you will find that there is not an idea which is not as mundane as one of Hogg's novels, and, moreover, nine-tenths of them, such as they are, were in print, in types, Bryan, before he was created.*

If Maginn knew that Hazlitt was the author, as seems the more likely from the fact that he tried to treat the review of Shelley as favorable to the poet, the Irish marksman had slain four birds with a single stone, having perpetrated thus an audacious quadruple attack upon Procter, Hazlitt, Shelley, and the **Edinburgh Review.**

In July, 1839, the **Edinburgh Review's** notice of Mrs. Shelley's edition of the poems in that year reflected the time-tempered impartiality which produced the best philosophical criticism of Shelley's poetry within our period.† The purpose of the essay was to point out certain specific elements of beauty in the poetry, and not to add to the increasing number of general discussions of the poet.

> Our only purpose is to supply what appears to us a deficiency in the common estimate of his powers; by indicating some of the more ordinary elements of poetical beauty, which are scattered profusely through his works; though often so evanescent as almost to escape the observation, dazzled by the misty light of his prevalent idealism.‡

Time had at least permitted the recognition of the fact that Shelley's maladjustment to society had been in part the fault of an environment inadequate for the development of precocious youth; England had made an enemy of a genius.

> When society rejects, or makes an enemy, of such a man as Shelley, it sustains a loss which the success of a whole tribe of steady, well-conditioned, well-conducted Philistines will not compensate.**

This was not an admission that Shelley's assault upon society had been justified, except as it suggested that all was not perfect with social institutions; much of the first part of the essay was a condemnation of the system of education which could permit such an estrangement.

Preceding the discussion of Shelley's art there was a passage in deprecation of his inane imitators (the critics of the time were aware of the existence of a whole school of them), who jeopardized the fame of their master by puerile imitation.

> No living or posthumous reputation has been subjected to a severer trial in this respect than that of Shelley. The unbearable coxcombry of the 'intense' and mystical school of versifiers, who made him their model — including both the Shellites [sic] of the old connection, and those of the new, or Tennysonites — had well nigh rendered his name a synonyme for all that is affected, and vapid, and unintelligible. Nor has his memory as yet entirely recovered from the unmerited discredit thus brought upon it. That his imagination was of the very highest order — nay, unequalled in the loftiness of its aspirations by that of any contemporary, is now scarcely a matter of controversy; — so much have he and others changed the poetical taste of this country since the time when he was set down, with the full approbation of the critical part of the community, as a dreamer and a mountebank. But this daring imagination . . . is almost the only poetical

* **Blackwood's,** Sept. 1824, Vol. XVI, p. 286.
† **Edinburgh Review,** July, 1839, Vol. 69 (American edition), pp. 269-281.
‡ Ibid., p. 273.
** Ibid., p. 271.

quality which ordinary readers at the present day appear inclined to concede to him.*

This study of neglected qualities of his art began with the tendency to personification of which Macaulay had made note, and resolved itself into an analysis of his peculiar figures of speech, a lengthy analysis of **The Cenci,** and a few conclusions regarding the quality of his creative mind.

> Impersonation of natural objects is the leading figure of his poetical diction — as it is, in a less exuberant degree, of that of Wordsworth. Natural objects are commonly used by philosophical poets to illustrate or typify the phenomena of human life. In Shelley these phenomena become attributes of the objects themselves. The type is, as it were, transmuted by a poetical analogy, like the **hypallage** of the rhetoricians, into the antitype which it originally represented. . . . It is the **leaves,** in Shelley, which wander past 'like troops of ghosts'. . . . In Shelley, the terror and agony are attributes of the falling mountain itself.†

The images thus arising in Shelley's poetry, the critic thought, were frequently so terrible as to be evidence of a morbid mind. The working of the imagination which produced them seemed analogous to the conceptive processes of a child, or to those of an idiot.

> This, then, is the point in which the man of genius continues to resemble the child. Ideality is the very life of life to all children. . . . And let it not be thought a degrading or an unmeaning comparison, when we say that the deficient intellect, which is weak but not entirely crushed, bears so far a resemblance to the growing mind of the boy, and to the delicate organization of the poet, that its owner, too, lives almost wholly in the imaginary world.‡

The development of the taste for the "picturesque," for which critics of the time were prone to examine their poets, and which they exhibited as a mark of excellence, was seen as having come late to Shelley, making itself evident chiefly after his Italian tours. The **Euganean Hills,** incidentally, was thought a labored poem, little likely to be pleasing to many readers.

The significance of the **Cenci** criticism, aside from what was said about the play itself, lies in the fact that the possession by Shelley of the dramatic talent, usually held to be dependent upon long experience with the real aspects of men and life, was regarded as an inexplicable paradox. If Shelley's mind was similar to the visionary and idealizing processes of children and idiots, his ability to probe the actualities of human sorrow and crime and to express their meanings in a literary form cognizant of dramatic aims, **must** seem a miracle. The truth of the matter would seem to be that, while the qualities of Shelley's **imagination** had been ingeniously and accurately described by the writer (in part), the nature of Shelley's **mind** and the extent and intensity of his grasp upon earthly affairs had not been suspected.

The passage was also significant for what it said of the play itself.

> The Cenci — a master-piece, but one of which it is difficult to speak in terms of sufficient dislike or sufficient admiration. Few read it, we suspect, except with a hurrying eagerness to get rid of those painful expressions of disgust, so widely different from the legitimate effects of dramatic poetry, which the story inevitably creates. It is, indeed, a loathsome subject, loathsomely handled; not, indeed, with that particular vice of a corrupt taste for which such a topic would have given occasion to many writers. Such depravation was entirely foreign to the sentiment, no less than the genius, of Shelley. But the horror which it excites, is merely that produced by the unalloyed, inartificial exhibition of physical pain and moral wretchedness. The characters are enveloped throughout the piece in one dark atmosphere, not of tragical necessity, but of unnatural passions, and meanness and cruelty almost equally unnatural. The character of Beatrice, nobly as it is conceived, yet affords no repose or bright contrast to the rest. Hers is the mere native dignity of a powerful mind and strong affections: moral principle there is none. The poet has given her neither hope in this world nor prospect beyond it. Her chief action is but a resolute lie, persisted in from innate bravery, and a scornful defiance of the cruelties of human law, rather than from any motive more calculated to excite sympathy. As to the fifth act . . . we confess that we could find as much pleasure in those choice scenes of some modern French romances, in which all the formalities of torture — burning at the stake, breaking on the wheel, and so forth — are deliberately set out by way of tickling the reader's sensibilities to the horrible.**

It is notable that, though the subject was still regarded as too horrible for aes-

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* Ibid., p. 273.
† P. 273.
‡ P. 275.
** P. 277.

thetic use, Shelley was cleared of the old charges of a perverted moral taste and an evil moral influence. The play was considered, properly, as a problem in taste and artistic propriety. The period disliked it because, while there had been developed a prevalent taste for Gothic romance, there was no precedent for Gothic reality.

The mystery of the possession by a mind considered to have been purely visionary of such skill in dramatic realism remained the most astonishing impression.

> And yet, in the midst of all this deformity, the play, as we have said, is marked not only with that stamp of poetical genius which is common to all his productions, but with a quality of all others least analogous to what might be conceived beforehand of the capabilities of such a mind — namely dramatic talent of the very highest order. The contrast between the pure, lofty, and resolute spirit of Beatrice, and the various degrees of weakness displayed by the witnesses of her wrongs, and agents of her purposes, is as powerful, as the art with which those several shades of weakness are discriminated is consummately delicate. . . . The whole play is full of such touches. . . . It is altogether among those miracles of genius, which no philosophy can account for, and no criticism can analyse. . . . That the imaginative faculty usually appears inborn, we know; but how the dramatic talent can be acquired by intuition, is an incomprehensible thing.*

We have seen that **The Cenci** is properly to be thought of as a work isolated in kind among Shelley's longer poems because it was the product, not of his genius working in its native inspirational milieu, but of a conscious and somewhat dubious digression into the field of comparatively realistic drama. This singular quality of the work struck the **Edinburgh** critic, not alone because the drama was recognized as out of the field of Shelley's normal expression, but equally because it was rendered conspicuous by the absence of convincing realism in the other longer works. "Either he considered his talents in that line to be not sufficiently understood and appreciated, or he was carried away by the overpowering tendency of his mind toward idealism." If the writer had added to this last conjecture the qualification that Shelley was also carried away by the bent of his **mind** toward works of earthly rehabilitation, he would have been, it seems, exactly right.

The absence of dramatic reality in **The Revolt of Islam** appeared to the essayist the result of an unfortunate mistake in the choice of poetical material, as well as the result of innate abstraction on the part of the poet.

> The essentially unpoetical character of ideal perfection in a human subject, was ill understood by Shelley. He imagined that whatever satisfied the aspirations of the visionary, must serve for the purpose of the poet; and did not perceive that what Kant calls 'the ideal, to which we do not annex objective reality,' is not suitable matter for an art necessarily objective in character, if not in substance.
>
> This alone would be sufficient to render such a poem as the 'Revolt of Islam' unsuccessful as a work of art. But, in point of fact, the sentiments which animate it never have attained, and never will attain, the common sympathies of mankind. It is a picture of vice, and physical and moral degradation, and loathsomeness of every description, all placed to the account of religion and government; to which, in some positive form or other, the sympathies of every human being are really devoted; while every impulse of generous and self-denying emotion is connected with zeal in behalf of the coldest and most barren of abstractions, political freedom; — that is, the mere absence of all positive principles of social union; — the idol, sometimes, of very youthful minds, which alone have force of imagination sufficient to invest so negative an image with ideal attractions, but which never drew forth a single sword in earnest, or was honoured by the devotion of a single martyr. Shelley was no politician. . . . When he endeavored to portray what he deemed the corruptions of the temporal and spiritual government of the world — as in the 'Revolt of Islam'; or of social usages — as in 'Rosalind and Helen,' the resemblance was so distorted and unnatural, that his readers turned away rather with a sickening incredulity than with the indignation which he meant to excite.†

This was premised upon the definition of poetry as a pictorial, quasi-realistic, objective, and human art, the recombination of known objects and accepted thoughts — an art alien to Shelley's airy imagination and abstract predilections. The absence from the work of popular, concrete appeal was thus correctly accounted for; the force of **The Revolt** both as poetry and as propaganda was acknowledged; the apparent and specifically destructive aim of the poem was recognized, but not its general inspirational intent — if this, as we believe, existed in Shelley's mind. The unpolitic direct assault upon tradition was also noted as a deterrent to public favor, and the representation of social institutions as wholly bad was added as a cause of offense to readers habituated to their operation and beneficent ends.

To these causes of a probable persistent unpopularity was added another, quite

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* Pp. 277-278.
† P. 278.

at odds, in its statement, with the usual dicta of preceding critics. Earlier writers had regularly granted Shelley the possession of a distinguished power of expression, though they found fault, usually, with the uses to which he put it. The **Edinburgh** critic thought him peculiarly hampered in his utterance.

> Perhaps no poet, with so wonderfully luxuriant a flow of ideas, had ever, as we think, less mastery over mere language. Scarcely a stanza that he has written, especially in his most imaginative poems, but seems pregnant with more thought than it was in his power to clothe with words. Instead of the ideas and the diction flowing harmoniously together, there is a constant struggle between them — the first are striving to emancipate themselves from a prison — the latter to expand and shape itself to the pressure of the overpowering spirit which informs it.*

This, of course, was a relative truth, and constituted a vague recognition of the turbulent body of inspired thought and vision which wrestled with its bard for utterance. It was equivalent to saying that Shelley's power of thought, or at least his inspiration, overmastered his power of expression; and, indirectly, it was a tribute to that quality in him which differentiated his work from the current picturesque versification of natural beauty, normal humanity, and thought unmoved by vision. It was an admission that here was a bard; but it was offered primarily as an additional reason for the difficulty with which readers followed his thought, and for the fact that his verses did not strike the mind with the indelible effect of epigram.

The review closed with the observation that the new edition provided altogether too few and too insignificant additions to his known work to solve the problem of how his genius might have brought its difficulties to final resolution.

Thus, in an essay of philosophical and temperate tone, and of orderly though informal structure, the later **Edinburgh Review** made recognition of several of the most peculiar of Shelley's traits. The method was analytical, expository, unargumentative; it balanced the matter of reformatory zeal with that of poetic art, thus giving attention to both phases of the poet's genius in proper proportion; it included both the criticism of individual works and suggestive theorizing about the poetic art in general. It was qualified by the sense of genuine poetic experience on the part of the essayist, wholesomely combined with the critical faculty. Finally, it was gratifyingly concrete in its method.

The qualities of the poet which it chose to emphasize converge into the characterization of his mind and method as instances of an abstraction alien to the popular taste. Shelley was recognized as an inspired thinker; his expression, though inadequate to the embodiment of his bardic thought for popular effect, was seen as characterized by the peculiar myth-making personifications of a mind perceptive chiefly of occult relationships between thought and object. The modern critic would probably add the statement that the poet possessed a more perfect mental grasp of actual life as manifest in human behavior, and of reasoned structural sense in building his poetry, than was recognized by the generation which thought of him as an erratic visionary.

The theory of poetry suggested by the essay is that which regarded poetical material as limited to ordinary emotional and external experience; as properly expressed in regular, direct, and uninverted figures of speech; and as directed to the creation of a comprehensible effect through the exploitation of objective beauty and received ideas.

The essay possessed also the mentally suggestive quality of the best criticism. One truth implied in it, but never fully stated, is that the evil inherent in civil and religious institutions, as Shelley saw them, lay largely in their violation of his spiritual and moral ideals — an offensive quality never very impressive upon the popular mind. He could anathematize them as perversions of the higher spiritual law, and be perfectly right; the common man, seeing how they defended hearth and home, conserved conventional thought, and robbed him of but little in tithes and taxes, might with a different justice stand to their defence. Until church and state should lay on more chains and take away more bread and meat, there was little hope that phlegmatic Englishmen would rise against them, having long been salubriously oblivious of manacles of the spirit and tithes levied against the soul.

In his famous attack upon **The Revolt of Islam,** in the **Quarterly Review,** Gifford's conservative Tory rival to **Blackwood's** and **The Edinburgh,** John Taylor Coleridge had ridden Shelley down with the Juggernaut of Church and State.† Shelley was described as being, through his self-destructive excesses of radicalism, the least pernicious, because most outspoken, member of a pernicious school. Here also lust for notoriety was assigned as a cause for his unspeakable follies; and so dangerous did Coleridge profess to consider the doctrine of the poem that he set out to explain whatever was obscure in the revised version, **The Revolt of Islam,** by what had been more explicit in **Laon and Cythna.** "Poetical criticism" was considered merely a secondary duty, until this primary moral responsibility should be discharged.

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* P. 280.

† **Quarterly Review,** April, 1819, Vol. XLII. Here quoted from the more convenient reprint in **Notorious Literary Attacks,** ed. Albert Mordell, New York, Boni and Liveright, 1926, pp. 63-82. This review is twice assigned by Peck to Sept., 1819: **Shelley: His Life and Work,** I, 97 and II, 40. The publication seems to have been delayed until September.

The "beauties" of the poem were disposed of by accusing Shelley of a sort of perverted imitation of Wordsworth, the usual admission of technical excellencies in parts, and the quotation of the description of Cythna.

> These, with all their imperfections, are beautiful stanzas; they are, however, of rare occurrence:— had the poem many such more, it could never, we are persuaded, become popular. Its merits and its faults equally conspire against it; it has not much ribaldry or voluptuousness for prurient imaginations, and no personal scandal for the malicious; and even those on whom it might be expected to act most dangerously by its semblance of enthusiasm, will have stout hearts to proceed beyond the first canto. As a whole, it is insupportably dull, and laboriously obscure; its absurdities are not of the kind which provoke laughter; the story is almost wholly devoid of interest, and very meagre; nor can we admire Mr. Shelley's mode of making up this defect; — as he has but one incident where he should have ten, he tells that one so intricately, that it takes the time of ten to comprehend it.*

This was excellent journalistic strategy, to rob the poem of any semblance of even a scandalous interest, or the poor distinction of furnishing unintended mirth.

It was next proposed to state Shelley's theory of government, and to prove that "his manner of advocating it is false and unsound," whether or not the poet could be made to see the fallacy of the theory itself. This theory consisted, the reviewer wrote, of solving the philosophical problem of evil by assigning all wickedness to the pernicious principles underlying "civil institutions and religious creeds," with the assertion that these were maintained "only by the stupidity of the many on the one hand, and the selfish conspiracy of the few on the other."

> According to him the earth is a boon garden needing little care or cultivavation, but pouring forth spontaneously and inexhaustibly all innocent delights and luxuries to her innumerable children; the seasons have no inclemencies, the air no pestilences for man in his proper state of wisdom and liberty; his business here is to enjoy himself, to abstain from no gratification, to repent of no sin, hate no crime, but be wise, happy and free, with plenty of "lawless love." This is man's natural state, the state to which Mr. Shelley will bring us, if we will but break up the "crust of our outworn opinions," as he calls them, and put them into his magic caldron. But kings have introduced war, legislators crime, priests sin; the dreadful consequences have been that the earth has lost her fertility, the seasons their mildness, the air its salubrity, man his freedom and happiness. We have become a foul-feeding carnivorous race, are foolish enough to feel uncomfortable after the commission of sin; some of us even go so far as to consider vice odious; and we all groan under a multiplied burden of crimes, **merely conventional;** among which Mr. Shelley specifies with great **sang froid** the commission of **incest**!†

The argument by which Shelley was said to have supported his case was shown to be invalid by a singular course of logic. If, said Coleridge, he had shown his plans for the millennium to be better than the **best** of present religious and civil organizations, he might have won his case; but he had **created** an evil religion, a corrupt government, and despotic tyrant for the purpose of proving his point by overthrowing them:

> . . . how can his argument have any weight with those who think they live under a paternal government and a pure faith, who look up with love and gratitude to a beneficent monarch, and reverence a zealous and upright priesthood? The laws and government on which Mr. Shelley's reasoning proceeds, are the Turkish, administered by a lawless despot; his religion is the Mohammedan, maintained by servile hypocrites; and his scene for their joint operation, Greece, the land full beyond all others of recollections of former glory and independence, now covered with shame and sunk in slavery. We are Englishmen, Christians, free, and independent; we ask Mr. Shelley how his case applies to us? or what we learn from it to the prejudice of our own institutions?‡

To this sophistry Leigh Hunt was prompt to make effective reply, and Professor Wilson to suggest that a dunce was rating a genius, as we shall see in the following chapter.

Following the cue of this perverse literality, Coleridge explained that the **means** of securing the millennium consisted in the superlative eloquence of Laon and Cythna, who altered the hearts and passions of men with their inspiring tongues. That the reformer would have difficulty in securing the services of such Demosthenic persuasion was sufficient clear to the writer from his happy recollection of Cicero's **Plures in omnibus rebus, quam in dicendo admirabiles;** but it seemed also evident that the

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* Mordell, p. 67.
† Ibid., pp. 68-69.
‡ Ibid., p. 72.

poet thought his champions already engaged for the conflict, since Laon was certainly Shelley, his Cythna designated by the introductory lines, and his ancient sage the insuperable Godwin.

> With such instruments doubtless the glorious task will be speedily accomplished — and what will be the issue? . . . Mr. Shelley would abrogate our laws — this would put an end to felonies and misdemeanors at a blow; he would abolish the rights of property, of course there could thenceforward be no violations of them, no heart-burnings between the poor and the rich, no disputed wills, no litigated inheritances, no food in short for sophistical judges, or hireling lawyers; he would overthrow the constitution, and then we should have no expensive court, no pension or sinecures, no silken lords or corrupt commoners, no slavish and enslaving army or navy; he would pull down our churches, level our Establishment, and burn our bibles — then we should pay no tithes, be enslaved by no superstitions, abused by no priestly artifices: marriage he cannot endure, and there would at once be a stop put to the lamented increase of adulterous connections amongst us, whilst by repealing the canon of heaven against incest, he would add to the purity, and heighten the ardour of those feelings with which brother and sister now regard each other; finally, as the basis of the whole scheme, he would have us renounce our belief in our religion, extinguish, if we can, the light of conscience within us, which embitters our joys here, and drown in oblivion the hopes and fears that hang over our hereafter. This is at least intelligible; but it is not so easy to describe the structure, which Mr. Shelley would build upon this vast heap of ruins. "Love," he says, "is to be the sole law which shall govern the moral world;" but Love is a wide word with many significations, and we are at a loss as to which of them he would have it now bear.*

This embarrassment did not last long; the author promptly selected the meaning of "Love" least creditable to the poet. With his graceful introduction he turned his attention to Shelley's life and character, which he defamed wih the neatest specious restraint in the world. Aside from a belated comment upon **Rosalind and Helen,** which was thought, in comparison with **The Revolt,**

> less interesting, less vigorous and chaste in language, less harmonious in versification, and less pure in thought; more rambling and diffuse, more palpably and consciously sophistical, more offensive and vulgar, more unintelligible,†

and thus condemned to a deep below the lowest depth, the rest of the review was given to the imparting of scandalous suggestions that no more conclusive proof of the evil of the poem could be secured than the author's life would furnish, were it made known in all its rottenness.‡

More than two years later the **Quarterly Review** carried an equally hostile but less personal review of **Prometheus Unbound.**** This also was among the attacks upon Shelley which were specifically answered by Leigh Hunt in the **Examiner,** in his articles to be presented in the next chapter. In this case, however, the assault was directed less against Shelley's moral offenses than against his alleged obscurity. The review combined a sarcastic avowal of the incomprehensibility of the poem with an assertion of the propriety of common sense as a standard of poetic judgment.

> Far be it from us to call for strict reasoning, or the precision of logical deductions, in poetry; but we have a right to demand clear, distinct conceptions. . . . Upon a question of mere beauty, there may be a difference of taste. . . . But the question of meaning, or no meaning, is a matter of fact on which common sense, with common attention, is adequate to decide; and the decision to which we may come will not be impugned, whatever be the want of taste, or insensibility to poetical excellence, which it may please Mr. Shelley, or any of his coterie, to impute to us.††

This was a cunning approach to the defamation of passages from the drama which could never be judged by standards other than those of beauty and taste; further defense of the method was presented in the assertion that if nonsense should be unfairly alleged, the isolated passages used in its proof would serve as refutation. By this pretence of fair reasoning, the critic avoided the legitimate responsibility of appreciation — the consideration of aesthetic effect — and freed himself for his career of logical devastation, the very procedure he affected to disavow.

The review thus resolved itself into a Maginnic enumeration of absurd obscurities drawn from **Prometheus** and the other poems of the volume. Several of the most abstract passages of the drama — passages by no means devoid of meaning if read

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* Ibid., pp. 76-77.
† Ibid., p. 80.
‡ For other **Quarterly Review** attacks on Shelley's morals and life, see Vols. 76, pp. 201-202; 39, pp. 192 and 210; 65, p. 516.
** **Quarterly Review,** Vol. 26, 1821-'22, Oct., 1821, pp. 168-180.
†† P. 169.

intelligently within their contexts — were recited and reduced to prose, the illogical nature of certain metaphors receiving the brunt of the attack. **The Cloud,** introduced as if it were a part of **Prometheus,** was disposed of by the quotation of the last stanza as "something that is done by a cloud." The complex and visionary image of the Spirit of the Earth, a conception seemingly drawn from the ancient astronomy of the concentric spheres, was summarized in prose, to its utter confusion. Similar analysis was accorded the description of Demogorgon and the vision of Love encircling the earth. It became evident that a part of the writer's quarrel was with the nature of poetic metaphor itself, and that his attack derived some show of justification from Shelley's occasional hyperbolic extensions of that figure to include reversed or unexpected analogies. An example of such incoherent metaphor was drawn from the phrase "an earthquake of sound," in **A Vision of the Sea,** with the objection that "an earthquake of sound is as difficult to understand as a cannon of sound, or a fiddle of sound." Similar exception was taken to the figure of Asia's spirit as a boat: "My soul is an enchanted boat;" as also to the figure of poets as chameleons, in its well-known passage of splendid Shakespearean lyric fantasy.

The very device by which Shelley, in the view of many a later and less partial critic, gave convincing visual reality to his personifications was analysed as if it were a fault:

> Another characteristic of Mr. Shelley's poetry is, that in his descriptions he never describes the thing directly, but transfers it to the properties of something which he conceives to resemble it by language which is to be taken partly in a metaphorical meaning, and partly in no meaning at all. . . .
>
> 'The hyacinth, purple, and white, and blue,
> Which flung from **its bells a sweet peal anew,**
> Of music so delicate, soft, and intense,
> It was felt like an odour within the sense.'
>
> It is worth while to observe the train of thought in this stanza. The bells of the flower occur to the poet's mind; but ought not bells to ring a peal? Accordingly, by a metamorphosis of the odour, the bells of the hyacinth are supposed to do so: the fragrance of the flower is first converted into a peal of music, and then the peal of music is in the last line transformed back into an odour. These are the tricks of a mere poetical harlequin, . . . In short, it is not too much to affirm, that in the whole volume there is not one original image of nature, one simple expression of human feeling, or one new association of the appearances of the moral with those of the material world.*

The figure chosen in this instance — and others less exceptionable were in the same list — is one somewhat open to legitimate objection upon the grounds of fantastic excess, but it is evident that such objection can never properly be supported except by the application of that very standard of taste and aesthetic propriety which the critic had discarded in favor of the questionable application of prose-logic.

The essayist was also careful to state that the undramatic nature of an alleged drama, the absence of a convincing method of earthly renovation, and the use of a complex mythology alien to human sympathy, did not constitute the grounds of his greatest objection to the poem. The cause of his mentioning them may therefore be but dimly and suspiciously surmised.

> We do not find fault with this poem, because it is built on notions which no longer possess any influence over the mind, but because its basis and its materials are mere dreaming, shadowy, incoherent abstractions. It would have been quite as absurd and extravagant in the time of Aeschylus, as it is now.†

The specious appeal of such poetry, he thought, was to be accounted for in the same fashion as the spell-binding powers of a Methodist evangelist, who pours out "a deluge of sonorous words that relate to sacred objects and devout feelings."

> In the same way, poetry like that of Mr. Shelley presents every where glittering constellations of words, which taken separately have a meaning, and either communicate some activity to the imagination, or dazzle it by their brilliance. Many of them relate to beautiful or interesting objects, and are therefore capable of imparting pleasure to us by the associations attached to them. The reader is conscious that his mind is raised from a state of stagnation, and he is willing to believe, that he is astounded and bewildered, not by the absurdity, but by the originality and sublimity of the author.‡

This captivating device in poetical composition, being evidently the product of

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* Pp. 174-175.
† Pp. 175-176.
‡ P. 176.

much misdirected thought on the part of the poet, was next condemned as an erroneous poetic method, as indicating a false theory on the part of the artist; and this fallacy was corrected by an **ex cathedra** utterance upon the art.

> We fear that his notions of poetry are fundamentally erroneous. It seems to be his maxim, that reason and sound thinking are aliens in the dominion of the Muses, and that, should they ever be found wandering about the foot of Parnassus, they ought to be chased away as spies sent to discover the nakedness of the land. We would wish to persuade him, if possible, that the poet is distinguished from the rest of his species, not by wanting what other men have, but by having what other men want. The reason of the poet ought to be cultivated with as much care as that of the philosopher, though the former chooses a peculiar field for its exercise, and associates with it in its labours other faculties that are not called forth in the mere investigation of truth.*

Consequently, now that his hopeless obscurity had been proved upon him, it followed that Shelley was no poet:

> If the poet is one who whirls round his reader's brain, till it becomes dizzy and confused; if it is his office to envelop he knows not what in huge folds of a clumsy drapery of splendid words and showy metaphors, then, without doubt, may Mr. Shelley place the Delphic laurel on his head. But take away from him the unintelligible, the confused, the incoherent, the bombastic, the affected, the extravagant, the hideously gorgeous, and 'Prometheus,' and the poems which accompany it, will sink at once into nothing.†

The following accusation of blasphemy and the device by which the reviewer fixed the guilt upon Shelley will receive further mention in connection with Leigh Hunt's reply. It seemed to the writer that the assault upon Christianity was simply one attempt among many directed at the destruction of a social order hateful to the poet; he did not perceive the respect for the Founder of that faith which was diametrically opposed in Shelley's mind to his intense hatred of the stultified and corrupted churchly organization which had made the name of its Origin a curse to the race.

After the reduction of the "painted veil" passage to prose order, the writer thought that his readers would now "probably perceive, that Mr. Shelley's poetry is, in sober sadness, **drivelling prose run mad."**‡

The review then closed with an affirmation of the moral responsibility of the critic, the statement of which involved, of course, the recognition of Shelley's reformatory purpose.

> Of his own principles he must admit, that, in exposing to the public what we believe to be the character and tendency of his writings, we discharge a sacred duty. He professes to write in order to reform the world. The essence of the proposed reformation is the destruction of religion and government. Such a reformation is not to our taste; and he must, therefore, applaud us for scrutinizing the merits of works which are intended to promote so detestable a purpose. Of Mr. Shelley himself we know nothing, and desire to know nothing. Be his private qualities what they may, his poems (and it is only with his poems that we have any concern) are at war with reason, with taste, with virtue, in short, with all that dignifies man, or that man reveres.**

The earlier **Quarterly Review** was thus uncompromisingly hostile to Shelley. Coleridge's review was chiefly directed at the poet's literary and personal immorality, made utterly false charges against his private life, dragged in the incest theme which had been expunged from the original **Laon and Cythna,** and attacked the ideas expressed in both versions with the weapon of a sort of ironical parody, not of phrases, but of ideas. It was adequately answered by Leigh Hunt, beyond whose reply we may go so far as to say that Coleridge's method was just only in so far as **The Revolt of Islam** was intended to be literally taken. This literal interpretation he carried, as we have seen, to absurd and unjustifiable extremes. Shelley's quite proper denial of responsibility for a complete and practicable social machinery to replace the old, we have presented elsewhere.

The review of **Prometheus** was directed more against Shelley's mental than against his moral shortcomings. Its critical method resembled that of Maginn in its cataloguing and reduction to prosaic absurdity of offending passages, but it lacked Maginn's brilliance of repartee, while it possessed more than his cunning in the disingenuous logic by which it sought to justify its procedure. It was a sarcastic avowal of Shelley's absurdity; it misused common sense in criticism to make Shelley's flights of hyperbolic fantasy seem ridiculous. So far as it employed a legitimate standard, it was that of classical restraint and consistency in the formation of metaphors; but this was misapplied by being made the sole criterion. The final test of a

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* Pp. 176-177.
† P. 177.
‡ P. 179.
** P. 180.

figure of speech, unless it is utterly without meaning, must be finally determined by the application of an aesthetic standard of taste rather than of a merely logical standard of accuracy.

John Stuart Mill's "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties" was first published in the **Monthly Repository** for January and October, 1833.* The first part of the essay was a reasoned attempt to arrive at an understanding of that "poetry" which constitutes an element in all the arts. The philosopher discovered that the true poetry is a thing to be distinguished from mere versification, from description, narrative, fiction, eloquence. He thought it subjective, the utterance of "impassioned truth," the expression of inward emotion rather than of outward fact; that it is intrinsically of the nature of soliloquy—unconscious, "overheard" rather than "heard," the "natural fruit of solitude and meditation."

From this he proceeded, in Part II, to the metaphysical psychology of poets, both born and made, and Shelley and Wordsworth appear as contrasting illustrations of two types of the poetic mind. They were "the two English authors of our own day who have produced the greatest quantity of true and enduring poetry,"† but they were quite unlike in the qualities of mind and temperament that make poetry and the poets. Wordsworth exemplified, for Mill, the mind rendered capable of poetry by intellectual culture; Shelley was the born poet, whose creations uttered themselves in a flow of emotion which took no conscious account of the element of didactic thought. Of the two types, one "has a distinct aim, common to him with any other didactic author: he desires to convey the thought, and he conveys it clothed in the feelings which it excites in himself, or which he deems most appropriate to it. The other merely pours forth the overflowing of his feelings; and all the thoughts which those feelings suggest are floated promiscuously along the stream."‡

This intellectual culture, Mill believed, was quite capable, in an individual of genuine emotions, of producing fine poetry, even in men not endowed by nature with the poetic mind. The much rarer "born poet," indeed, might suffer by the lack of this very element of cultural discipline, inasmuch as two faculties may be thought better than one. The poetic mind he thought not incompatible with this discipline, if the one influence were not permitted too completely to dominate the other; and he judged that Shelley, "mere poet," might have become the "philosopher-poet" as well if this "systematical, intellectual culture, in a measure proportioned to the intensity of his own nature," had not been wanting. Even as he was, he had possessed a portion of the moderating quality.

> If the peculiarities of the poetic temperament were uncontrollable in any poet, they might be supposed so in Shelley; yet how powerfully, in the "Cenci," does he coerce and restrain all the characteristic qualities of his genius! what severe simplicity, in place of his usual barbaric splendor! how rigidly does he keep the feelings and the imagery in subordination to the thought!**

But for Mill Shelley was, in essence, "perhaps the most striking example ever known of the poetic temperament," and his poetry was, on the whole, not the product of a restraining intellectual culture.

> He had not, at the period of his deplorably early death, reached sufficiently far in that intellectual progression of which he was capable, and which, if it has done so much for greatly inferior natures, might have made of him the most perfect, as he was already the most gifted, of our poets. For him, involuntary mental discipline had done little; the vividness of his emotions and of his sensations had done all. He seldom follows up an idea; it starts into life, summons from the fairy-land of his inexhaustible fancy some three or four bold images, then vanishes, and straight he is off on the wings of some casual association into quite another sphere. He had scarcely yet acquired the consecutiveness of thought necessary for a long poem. His more ambitious compositions too often resemble the scattered fragments of a mirror, — colors brilliant as life, single images without end, but no picture. It is only when under the overruling influence of some one state of feeling, either actually experienced, or summoned up in the vividness of reality by a fervid imagination, that he writes as a great poet; unity of feeling being to him the harmonizing principle which a central idea is to minds of another class, and supplying the coherency and consistency which would else have been wanting. Thus it is in many of his smaller, and especially his lyrical poems. They are obviously written to exhale, perhaps to relieve, a state of feeling, or of conception of feeling, almost oppressive from its vividness. The thoughts and imagery are suggested by the feeling, and are such as it finds unsought. . . . States of feeling, whether sensuous or spiritual, which thus possess the whole being, are the fountains of that which we have called the poetry of poets, and which is little else than a pouring-forth of the thoughts and images that pass across the mind while

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* Reprinted in Vol. I of **Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical**, New York, Holt, 1874. Four vols.

† **Dissertations**, Vol. I, p. 109.

‡ Ibid., p. 109.

** Ibid., p. 118.

some permanent state of feeling is occupying it.*

The profusion of imagery, the excess of which in Shelley's poetry seemed to Mill to constitute a fault, was thus accounted for in terms of this "same original fineness of organization."

> The susceptibility of his nervous system, which made his emotions intense, made also the impressions of his external senses deep and clear; and agreeably to the law of association, by which, as already remarked, the strongest impressions are those which associate themselves the most easily and strongly, these vivid sensations were readily recalled to mind by all objects or thoughts which had co-existed with them, and by all feelings which in any degree resembled them. Never did a fancy so teem with sensuous imagery as Shelley's. Wordsworth economizes an image, and detains it until he has distilled all the poetry out of it, and it will not yield a drop more; Shelley lavishes his with a profusion which is unconscious because it is inexhaustible.†

Thus the philosopher completed his circle and arrived again at the hypothesis from which he had set out.

Mill's method resembled that of Hazlitt in that each professed to refer its conclusions about Shelley to the known characteristics of a genus of creative minds. Both set out to relate him to a mental type. The all-important difference is that Hazlitt's essay put its emphasis upon Shelley himself, making its thesis a medium of judgment upon the poet, while Mill's study centered upon the hypothesis in question and used the poet chiefly as illustration. One dealt primarily with Shelley; the other primarily with a theory of creative psychology.

Mill, moreover, professed to deal only with the qualities of Shelley's creative imagination. He was not concerned with the intellectual or moral aspects, as such, of the poet's works. The intellectually deliberate, the morally purposeful elements in Shelley's poems, left out of account, tend to render such generalizations as his about uninhibited imaginative poesy dangerous, if not in part invalid. Certainly there were directive ideas, limiting forms, and unfanciful aims in most of the longer poems; it was only within such morphological restrictions as these that the imagination of which Mill spoke maintained its course of associative and fantastic creation. It was, perhaps, only in such poems as the **Witch of Atlas,** in which, as Mrs. Shelley wrote, the poet freed his fancy to pursue its unpremeditated flight, that this native imagination functioned in just the manner the philosopher described. In connection with such poems as these, and with the instances in which the fancy broke its bondage of form and directive purpose, Mill was exactly right. His interpretation seems perfect within its scope and in its general conclusions, but it is incomplete.

Thus was written a sort of generic psychoanalysis upon poets, rather than a critical account of poems. The study necessitated no Procrustean mutilations, inasmuch as Mill used only that aspect of the poet's nature which accommodated itself most readily to the premises of his argument. Upon the basis of one salient feature of his genius, Shelley was thus ranked high among the immortals. It is gratifying to note that Mill placed him upon this eminence not only because Shelley seemed to him to possess the essence of the poetic nature, but equally because Shelley seemed to the philosopher actually to have produced great poetry. This double assertion may be considered the sum and substance of the criticism.‡

The **London Magazine's** review of **The Cenci** is significant of the contemporary attitude toward Shelley's use of a subject deemed too horrible for the stage. It was the judgment of the critic, not merely that the poet had hit upon too ghastly a story for his play, but that its use indicated a morbid and morally perverted mind. Linked with this were the view that vanity and a delight in spectacular rebellion of an antisocial sort had furnished the motive for selecting such a subject, and the recognition of the poet's stylistic genius.

> His language, as he travels through the most exaggerated incidents, retains its correctness and simplicity; — and the most beautiful images, the most delicate and finished ornaments of sentiment and description, the most touching tenderness, graceful sorrow, and solemn appalling misery, constitute the very genius of poesy, present and powerful in these pages, but, strange and lamentable to say, closely connected with the signs of a depraved, nay mawkish, or rather emasculated moral taste, craving after trash, filth, and poison, and sickening at wholesome nutriment.**

The conclusions were that Shelley was vain and of weak moral character, and that this vanity and weakness, together with his morbid predisposition of mind, constituted the cause of his constant use of antisocial subjects.

This review also implied that the acceptable view of human nature for poetic use was an idealized and standardized conception that should be morally edifying merely

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* Ibid., pp. 112-113.
† Ibid., pp. 113-114.
‡ For an interesting review of Mill's attitude toward Shelley, see the **Quarterly Review,** Vol. 136, 1874.
** **London Magazine,** May, 1820, Vol. I, p. 547.

by directly didactic example. The subject of **The Cenci** was deemed "altogether out of the Muse's province"; the reason for this was that the character of the Count was not true human nature at all, but a demoralizing perversion of it.

> . . . will any who are not the same [mad], or more, pretend that the horrors of madness . . . can properly furnish the principal interest of a dramatic composition, claiming the sympathy of mankind as a representation of human nature?*

It was the critic's firm opinion that no such story could teach "the human heart the knowledge of itself," and that no high moral purpose could possibly be served by the representation of Bedlam insanity. The ancient Greeks, he thought, might justly use such themes, because, with their characters, unnatural deeds were done under the awful compulsion of Destiny and the Furies, and thus human nature was not degraded by voluntary depravity. But Shelley had made his characters responsible for their wickedness, and had thus rendered the horrible a corrupting rather than a cleansing agency. The conclusion, following a list of quoted passages calculated to establish the obscene nature of the drama, was that the play was "the production of a man of great genius, and of a most unhappy moral constitution."

The significance of this and similar reviews lies chiefly in their indication of the moral attitude toward literature prevalent in the period. Human nature in the drama should be **human** and heart-warming. Evil must not be exploited, perversion must not be admitted; the employment of these, in the face of the temper of the times, was conclusive evidence, not merely of an aesthetic error, but of an immoral cast of mind and of a deliberate aim at notoriety by means of noxious affront to the public morals. So far as this position prevailed — and it seems to have been quite prevalent — the taste of the time stands convicted of a peculiarly narrow range of interest in the literary treatment of human material. The Romantic movement, viewed as revolt, had broadened the field of legitimate poetic subject matter; a critical attitude governed by such a restricted definition of the properly poetic as this must be viewed as reactionary. Such incapacity to appreciate Shelley's play — and this incapacity was not universal — seems to have resulted more from the current preconceptions of poetry than from specific hositility to Shelley. It is interesting to note that he was here condemned for his sins of realism rather than for his vagaries of romance or his offenses of obscurity.

Similarly hostile was the review of **The Cenci** in the **Literary Gazette,** which review professed to serve the public as a light over a dangerous sewer, to warn away those who might stumble therein.

> Of all the abominations which intellectual perversion, and poetical atheism, have produced in our times, this tragedy appears to us to be the most abominable. . . .
>
> We have heard of Mr. Shelley's genius; and were it exercised upon any subject not utterly revolting to human nature, we might acknowledge it. But there are topics so disgusting . . . and this is one of them; there are themes so vile . . . as this is; there are descriptions so abhorrent to mankind . . . and this drama is full of them; there are crimes so beastly and demoniac . . . in which the Cenci riots and luxuriates, that no feeling can be excited by their obtrusion but those of detestation at the choice, and horror at the elaboration.†

Shelley was further accused of the "minute portraiture" of evil, of blasphemy in his frequent uses of the name of God, of having perpetrated a libel on human nature by the representation of such evil as could never have existed, and of being the victim of his own perverted mind. The play seemed "the production of a fiend, and calculated for the entertainment of devils in hell." It was "the conception of a brain not only distempered, but familiar with infamous images, and accursed contemplations." The reviewer refused to believe that such a story could be current in Italy, as Shelley had affirmed it was; he resented Shelley's reference, in connection with his elucidation of the Count's character, to hypocritical religion in Protestant countries; he objected that the characters of the play were without exception evil beings; that the obscurity increased as Beatrice was brought forward more and more prominently into the action; and that the whole was, in his opinion, a "dish of carrion."

> The foul mixture of religion and blasphemy, and the dreadful association of virtuous principles with incest, parricide, and every deadly sin, form a picture which, "To look upon we dare not."

The banquet scene was quoted, which, though

> far from being the most obnoxious, unnatural, and infernal in the play, would fully justify the reprobation we have pronounced.‡

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* Ibid., p. 548.
† **Literary Gazette,** April 1, 1820, pp. 209-210.
‡ Ibid., p. 210.

The most significant elements in this review were the quotation and praise (as "powerful writing") of the description of the crag-shadowed valley in which Cenci was to be ambushed by conspiracy of his family, and the allegation that Shelley had misrepresented human nature in the portrayal of excessively evil characters. The remarkable frequency with which contemporary reviewers of the play quoted the impressive description of the mountain pass indicates the strength, in the poetical tastes of the time, of that love of the "picturesque" in nature poetry which so often led to the enumeration and quotation of pictorial "beauties."* This admiration for the picturesque was so prevalent in the early nineteenth century criticism as often to determine its interpretative procedure. The charge that Shelley had perpetrated a libel upon humanity likewise indicated that there was a strong feeling in favor of the use in literature of only those human traits which conservative taste regarded as normal, elevating, and wholesome.†

The **Literary Gazette** review was, thus, interesting chiefly as indicative of the critical belief in a firmly conventionalized moral method in the representation of human character in poetry.

The reviewer of **The Cenci** for the **New Monthly Magazine** was also disgusted by the subject of the play, and implied that its apparent justification of parricide was quite as bad as its use of the incest theme. He thought the contemplation of vice an encouragement to evil thoughts and deeds, thought Shelley quite unable to diminish the actual horror by invoking the ideal, and mistook the aim of the poet in dealing with the subject of evil. The catharsis of tragic pity he overlooked entirely in trying to account for the morbid choice of the dramatist, which he finally attributed to a lack of the "power of religious truth." The use by an optimistic philosopher of a picture of degraded human nature seemed very strange to him.

But he added to this opinion a somewhat more specific comment upon the dramatic structure of the play than was common in the moralistic reviews of the period: the play he thought successful in its realism:

> With the exception of Cenci, who is half maniac and half fiend, his persons speak and act like creatures of flesh and blood, not like the problems of strange philosophy set in motion by galvanic art . . . The earlier scenes of the play are tame — the middle ones petrifying — and the last scene of all, affecting and gentle.

The ravine description, as usual, was quoted, but as the only "isolated poetry" in the piece, which, on the whole, was direct, dramatic, and effective in its realism. The sincerity of the critic was attested by his appreciation of the pathos of the hair and girdle, so easy to parody and ridicule, which he thought "welcome as breaking the iron spell which so long has bound the current of sympathy."‡

The hostility of the **Literary Gazette** to Shelley was not, however, limited to the apparently sincere antagonism of the reviewer of **The Cenci.** In September of the same year **Prometheus Unbound** was unmercifully damned by a writer of malicious wit and uncompromising public conscience. Nothing good was said of the poem. On the basis of some of his finest passages, Shelley was adjudged quite as insane as Poor Tom, and unhesitatingly consigned to Bedlam. It would seem that a critic who had quite enough intelligence to understand the poem, but who had not taken the trouble to do so, was concealing his lack of comprehension under the mask of anonymous vituperation. The passages of the drama had been to him "inflexibly unintelligible, and are so to the present hour, when it is our duty to explain them **pro bono publico.**"

> To our apprehensions, Prometheus is little else but absolute raving; and were we not assured of the contrary, we should take it for granted that the author was lunatic — as his principles are ludicrously wicked, and his poetry a melange of nonsense, cockneyism, poverty, and pedantry.**

This critic also was dutifully aware of a moral responsibility to the public, perhaps this time not so sincerely felt, to "stem such a tide of literary folly and corruption."

Shelley's Preface to the drama was first attacked as meaningless mysticism and bad prose, and these charges were "proved" by the quotation of one of his most splendid and lucid sentences, on the subject of the influence of their times upon poets.†† This seems mere malice.

Likewise, some of the best poetry of the drama was used to prove the absurdity of the poem itself. The passage used was that beginning with the phrase "Ye icy springs . . . "

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* In this and other passages quoted in review, the element of "strangeness" in the poetry suggests that the "picturesque" and the "romantic" were often confused, or identified one with the other. See W. P. Ker's **The Art of Poetry,** Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923, the lecture on "Romantic Fallacies," pp. 75-76.

† Cf. Watkins's **Memoirs of Byron,** as paraphrased at the beginning of this chapter.

‡ **New Monthly Magazine,** 1820, Vol. XIII, pp. 550-553.

** **Literary Gazette,** Sept. 9, 1820, p. 580 ff.

†† "It is true that, not the spirit of their genius, but the forms in which it has manifested itself, are due less to the peculiarities of their own minds than to the peculiarity of the moral and intellectual condition of the minds among which they have been produced."—**Complete Poems,** Cambridge ed., p. 163.

> This first extract will let our readers into the chief secret of Mr. Shelley's poetry, which is merely opposition of words, phrases, and sentiments, so violent as to be utter nonsense.

The poet's use of many color words was likewise villified, the critic having discovered within seventeen lines seven different colors and almost as many shades. "Surely, the author looks at nature through a prism instead of spectacles." The use of many compound adjectives was also regarded as a "villainous" fault.

The description of Demogorgon as a shapeless and indeterminate darkness was especially incriminating.

> We yield ourselves, miserable humdrum devils that we are, to this high imaginative faculty of the modern muse. We acknowledge that hyperbola, extravagance, and irreconcileable terms, may be poetry. We admit that common sense has nothing to do with "the beautiful idealisms" of Mr. Shelley. And we only add that if this be genuine inspiration, and not the grossest absurdity, then is farce sublime, and maniacal raving the perfection of reasoning.

Shelley's astronomy and meteorology added to the critic's discomfort. After the quotation of

> "An eagle so caught in some bursting cloud
> On Caucasus, his **thunder-baffled wings**
> **Entangled in the Whirlwind!**"

the comment upon this excellent and majestical figure was:

> An' these extracts do not entitle the author to a cell, clean straw, bread and water, a strait waistcoat, and phlebotomy, there is no madness in scribbling.

This was criticism somewhat in the manner of Maginn's rationalizing ridicule. It should be said, in justice, that the quarrel of the writer, if it was sincere, was partly against the new exuberance of Romanticism — of the Romantic technique rather than of the Romantic thought. Shelley's **Prometheus,** judged by a mind less loftily imaginative than his own, does suffer by reason of its lack of restrained diction and ordinary pictorial clarity. But in this review it would seem that the characters of the poem were being judged in terms of conformity to human models, its images in terms of similitude to experienced physical contours and colors, and its language in terms of the intellectual accuracy of prose. Hardly otherwise, malice aside, could the poem have seemed quite so ridiculous, even in the eyes of an infidel to fancy. The critic invalidated his interpretation by manifest hostility to both a new school of imaginative verse and the unique contribution to it of a new and individual artist, and indicated the weakness of his own position by that very excess of abuse which was intended to enforce it.

Taking his cue, perhaps, from Dr. Maginn, and much of his method as well, the reviewer of the **Gazette** continued the campaign against Shelley with another "roast" of **Adonais,** lukewarm and insipid compared with that of the Irish cavalier.* Here the moral question, in connection with the old charge of blasphemy, was brought in again, and echoes of the critic of the "Cockney School" were heard.

> For what is the praise of the cockneys but disgrace, or what honourable inscription can be placed over the dead by the hand of notorious libellers, exiled adulterers, and avowed atheists.

Maginn's catalogue of absurdities came into fresh use, the critic finding in **Adonais** delightful instances of "nonsense-pastoral," "nonsense-physical," "nonsense-vermicular," "nonsense-pathetic," "nonsense-nondescript," and "nonsense-personal." The climactic passage of the review is commentary enough upon its spirit and method, especially since it dealt with a poem about the merits of which there can be little modern disagreement.

> The poetry of the work is contemptible — a mere collection of bloated words heaped on each other without order, harmony, or meaning; the refuse of a schoolboy's commonplace book, full of the vulgarisms of pastoral poetry, yellow gems and blue stars, bright Phoebus and rosy-fingered Aurora; and of this stuff is Keats's wretched Elegy compiled!

In the middle of 1821 the **Gazette** printed a review of the pirated edition of **Queen Mab** which appeared in that year, acknowledging in a note that Shelley probably did not know of its publication. This essay was the first in the **Gazette** to admit any good in Shelley's poetry (with the exception of the reference to the **Cenci** passage), but it was also the most serious, conscientious, and sorrowful condemnation of the poet's views. The reviewer's purpose was almost wholly moral, the defense

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* **Literary Gazette,** Dec. 8, 1821. Maginn's article was in the December issue of **Blackwood's** for the same year.

of society almost his only aim. The genius of the poet was conceded, but only by a severe effort of the imagination had the critic been able to picture him without cloven hoofs and a tail. The inner man was certainly a demon, whose principles had shown their fruit in his own life.

> Such, alas! are the inevitable consequences of the fatal precepts enforced in this publication, which spares not one grace, one good, one ornament, nor one blessing, that can ameliorate our life on earth; which wages exterminating war against all that can refine, delight or improve human kind; which ridicules everything that can contribute to our happiness here, and boldly tries to crush every hope that could point to our happiness hereafter.*

The descriptive passages of the poem, as usual, were regarded as excellent poetry, but the "vilest of purposes" had forestalled their duplication in other parts of the work. Many lines were thought excellently made "to draw a virtuous moral from," but the author had perniciously refused the obvious lessons of his own creation. The passage beginning "How beautiful this night" was judged to be the "noblest" ever "imagined" by the author; but with trembling pen the critic was forced to turn from these beautiful but unredemptive things to the blasphemous and awful doctrines that annulled them.

> The utter annihilation of every enjoyment which man can have on earth — the black catalogue of woes, to which so dreadful a creed as this must tend . . . all the idiotcy of its conception, and all the villany of its avowal — deprive us of words to speak our detestation of its author.

This proved infamy of the poem could not be ignored in passing judgment upon its creator, as a footnote to the review affirmed. (In the reviews, footnotes were frequently privileged to become more personal than the essays proper.)

> We are aware, that ordinary criticism has little or nothing to do with the personal conduct of authors; but when the most horrible doctrines are promulgated with appalling force, it is the duty of every man to expose, in every way, the abominations to which they irresistibly drive their odious professors. We declare against receiving our social impulses from a destroyer of every social virtue; our moral creed, from an incestuous wretch; or our religion, from an atheist, who denied God, and reviled the purest institutes of human philosophy and divine ordination, did such a demon exist.

Queen Mab had never, properly speaking, been published by Shelley. Upon the occasion of this pirated edition he was prompt to recant, but not entirely. Against the tyrannies of organized Church and monarchistic state he was as stanch as ever, but the bad poetry and the violent and too offensive mode of the poem he thought sound reasons for repentance, since he feared they might do more harm than good to the cause of freedom.† The method of the poem he had long since discarded, but he was mildly amused at the outcry attending its second printing, and had probably modified his antisocial views to a degree, inasmuch as he seems to have forgotten some of the most offensive of them. As they appeared in the poem, the notes on religion, chastity, and marriage were such as to make the **Gazette** review seem scarcely intemperate, except in the footnote which represented the poet as a consistent and extreme practitioner of all that he had preached in his youthful days.

The **Literary Gazette** was thus almost completely hostile to Shelley and his art. Its aim, in his case, was chiefly limited to moral evaluation; the reviews were apparently by at least two different hands, one unfairly malicious, the other sincerely sorrowful but firm. Its critical methods were scarcely more than eloquent damnation of moral offense, specific fault-finding with romantic extravagances of diction and image, and Maginn-like cataloguing of alleged asininities. Its objections to the subject of **The Cenci,** though in accord with much contemporary opinion, were hysterical, and, in their inclusion of the charge of the exploitations of vice, untrue. The chief interest of its criticisms lies in the additional evidence they offer of the prevalence of the doctrine of the "picturesque" and that of the moral criterion for poetical characterization.

In the **Monthly Review** of the year 1821 there appeared adjacent reviews of **The Cenci** and **Prometheus Unbound.**‡ These were brief notices, containing much quoted matter from the poems; the tone attempted the spritely and clever, and was not moralistic; the genius of Shelley was conceded, only to be depreciated by fault-finding. The critic was aware of a rising school of poetry, but quite hostile to its tenets. The influence of the old English dramatists, as he saw it, was at work, in this new tendency to scale imaginative and forbidden heights. The subject of **The Cenci** he thought revolting, and in any period to be regarded as

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* **Literary Gazette,** May 19, 1821.

† See the letters quoted on the subject in Peck's **Shelley: His Life and Work,** II, pp. 228-230.

‡ **Monthly Review,** 1821, Vol. XCIV, pp. 161-173.

> manifest proof of the rudeness and barbarism of a newly-born or lately reviving literature. . . Yet such a bias towards the older school of poetry, and all its faults, exists at this moment in England, that every champion of common sense, who strives to oppose the prejudice, is at once branded with the imputation of a narrow understanding, and a French taste.

This was the eighteenth century addressing the Romantic Revival.

Shelley was regarded as one of the new fashionable devotees of the "antient English drama," and one peculiarly subject to the malady of "old-play-insanity."* The critic quarrelled with the **Cenci** preface as upholding the "exploded **Wordsworthian heresy**" (Shelley was really denying it), and with Shelley's attempt to exclude decorative and fanciful poetry from **The Cenci** as contrary to the practice of his ancient preceptors. After several accusations of bad faith, religious doubt, and literary vanity, the critic had done, as for that play:

> Mr. Shelley, like an unfledged and unpractised giant, attempts to scale heaven on a chicken's pinion.

As to **Prometheus,** it was agreed with the **Gazette** that it was nonsense, unsufficiently redeemed by what good poetry it contained. Its content was summarized as a sufficient commentary:

> First, there is a **wicked supreme deity.** — Secondly, there is a Demogorgon; superior, in process of time, to that **supreme wickedness.** — Thirdly, there are nymphs, naids, nereids, spirits of flood and fell, depth and height, the four elements, and fifty-four imaginary places of creation and residence. — Now, to what does all this tend? To nothing, positively to nothing.

The critic would fain rescue and admonish, but fools rush on beyond the reach of wisdom.

Epipsychidion, the "idealized history" of Shelley's experience in search of the soul that should match his own and thus fulfill his ideal of love, came and went almost without mention by the periodical press of its time. It was issued for the "esoteric few" and published anonymously "to avoid the malignity of those who turn sweet food into poison, transforming all they touch into the corruption of their own natures."† The identification of the spiritual ideal with an earthly avatar in Emilia Viviani left the poem peculiarly open to the fleshly interpretation, by those who were not of the esoteric. An obscure periodical, **The Gossip,** printed a review in 1821, and early in the following year a letter addressed to Christopher North gave further notice of the poem through the pages of **Blackwood's.** To the **Gossip** essayist it appeared as a beautiful but immodest proposal of unsanctioned cohabitation upon a desert isle, poetically put to a lady by a gentleman. The reviewer was chiefly concerned with the probable state of the lady when she should return to orthodox society. He quoted enough of the poem to explain its author's genius, condemned the "contempt" of the author for those who would not be able to understand the poem, and closed with a "pang of regret that his mind should be harassed and wasted on such wild and impracticable schemes of happiness, totally at variance with the experience of mankind, and the interests of society."‡

For once Shelley had been too concrete in his poetic representation of spiritual experience! It is not necessary to observe that the Platonic idealism of the poem was non-existent for this reader, and that the quoted passages convey no final proof that even the poetic dress of the idealized experience was seen in its full beauty.

The "Letter from London," signed by "John Johnes," which gave notice to the poem in **Blackwood's,** carried the misinterpretation still further by dragging in the charge of incest, apparently upon the basis of Shelley's figurative use of the word "Sister." The poem was called to North's attention as follows:

> Did it ever fall in your way to see a poem with this title, "Epipsychidion: Verses addressed to the noble and unfortunate Lady Emilia V- - - - -, now imprisoned in the convent of - - - - - - - -?" This little pamphlet is a threefold curiosity, on account of the impenetrable mysticism of its greater portion, the delicious beauty of the rest, and the object of the whole, which I take to be an endeavor to set aside the divine prohibition, that a man must not marry his own sister. The poem was published anonymously, but as people began to apply it to a certain individual, and make their own inferences, it was, I believe, suddenly withdrawn from circulation. There is no doubt but it comes from the Holy Pisan Alliance; and some of its insulated passages are worthy of the genius which dwells among the members of that body. I read this poem last night at the hushed and sleeping hour of twelve, and never was I so enchanted as in wandering among its strange, etherial, dreamy fancies, some of which contain, in my opinion, the very soul and essence of ideal poesy.**

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* For another accusation of following old models and disowning Pope, see **Blackwood's,** Sept. 1821, Vol. X, p. 184.

† Shelley's letter to Ollier, Cambridge edition of the **Complete Poems,** p. 298.

‡ **The Gossip,** Saturday, June 23, 1821.

** **Blackwood's,** February, 1822, Vol. XI, pp. 237-8.

This admiring but mischievous correspondent had reason to think that North would be led to respond to this description.

> There is no elderly gentleman in the kingdom, afflicted with good living and the gout, to whom I would confide such poetry as this, except yourself. On you it will not be wasted. . . .

And it was not. Though the letter-writer had not known who the author of the poem was, the mention of incest was all that North needed. His note was as follows:

> Our readers will probably suspect, that our correspondent's intention is to attribute the poem in question to Lord Byron; but we venture to say, that there is nobody capable of wasting such poetry on such a theme, except only the unfortunate Mr. Shelly. To this gentleman's genius we have always done justice; and hitherto we have really avoided . . . the smallest allusion to his private character. But Percy Bysshe Shelly has now published a long series of poems, the only object of which seems to be the promotion of ATHEISM and INCEST; and we can no longer hesitate to avow our belief, that he is as worthy of co-operating with the King of Cockaigne, as he is unworthy of co-operating with Lord Byron. Shelly is a man of genius, but he has no sort of sense or judgment. He is merely "an inspired idiot!"

The **Liberal** project of Hunt, Shelley, and Byron in Italy had proved too much, by a straw, for **Blackwood's** patience.

If we may believe the date to which it was assigned, the anonymous "Portfolio of a Man of the World" recorded in the following year a more dispassionate attitude toward the poet. It appears to have been the work of a calm, eupeptic dilettante with some slight knowledge of classical Greek and much confidence in his own personal gift for analytical criticism. In his discussion of **Prometheus Unbound,** this gentleman was concerned not at all with the doctrine of the poem, except as a bar to its popular acceptance, and characterized it as a mixture of sublimity and anticlimactic absurdity. The blank verse he thought enigmatically individual — "Shelleyic" and yet Miltonic. The drama was "what, had Aeschylus lived in the nineteenth century, and been an Englishman, he might have written." But the details of the work — and the "Portfolio" contained quite an enumeration of them — constituted a "mixture of good and bad taste." As to the doctrine:

> The extraordinary profanity with which he introduces the most sacred subject has at once and completely annihilated the poem, so far as the public generally are concerned. . . . If he does not care about its being read, why publish it? But in an antique subject like this he need not have gone out of Paganism. However, he has admirers very likely who admire him most for this; while those who admire him so fervently for what is so admirable — his genius, his learning, his gifted mind, his inexhaustible poetic power — must always do so with a "but."*

In the year of Shelley's death a reviewer for the **Gentleman's Magazine** went on record as regarding Shelley's poetry as contemptible and his life and influence as diabolical:

> Concerning the talents of Mr. Shelley, we know no more than that he published certain convulsive caperings of Pegasus labouring under cholic pains; namely, some purely fantastic verses, in the hubble bubble, toil and trouble style; and as to Mr. Shelley's virtues, if he belonged (as we understand he did), to a junta, whose writings tend to make our sons profligates, and our daughters strumpets, we ought as justly to regret the decease of the Devil. . . .†

The preceding four items are interesting chiefly as examples of opinion upon Shelley at about the time his life came to its sudden end. Belief in his permanently perverted and immoral character had grown, in the minds of the people of literary interest, into what was almost a legend. Charges of unorthodox thought, which at first had been well founded upon the teachings of his poems, had grown by pernicious expansion, unfounded deduction, and malicious misinterpretation, to render him a demon in purpose and a libertine in habit. Critics were taking sad leave of his hopeless case, or consigning him to perdition with such impatience as prohibited thoughtful appreciation of his work in its unmoral aspects, or even that generalized acknowledgment of his genius which had tempered their earlier condemnation. Though it was much too early for one to be written, it was at this stage, perhaps, that an accurate and intelligent biography would have rendered the best service to Shelley's reputation and to the public understanding of his work. Leigh Hunt was doing

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* Extracts from the "Portfolio" published in the **Gentleman's Magazine,** February, 1848. It may have been a hoax of the later date, but internal evidence seems to indicate the date, June, 1823, to which it was assigned by the editor.

† **Gentleman's Magazine,** 1822, Part II, p. 623. A review of "Arthur Brooke's" elegy: see Ch. I.

what he could, but by reason of his own reputation his advocacy of the poet was proving, in the higher critical circles, a liability rather than an asset.

The Censor, the only volume of which was completed in London in 1829, contained in its numbers for October 4 and 18, 1828, an extremely superficial and euphuistic article entitled "Byron and Shelley." The author complained that Shelley had not always been "agreeable to the rules of euphony"; he himself, at least, served them most faithfully. He regarded Shelley as an unstudied and effortless genius; Byron he thought too much the conscious artist.

> We think Shelley, in the delivery of his sentiments, preferable to Byron: the latter evidently had a ready and brilliant conception, but after the thought had been conceived he studied how he should express it; — the former gave his imaginations to the world just as they occurred. . . . Every sound that came from the harp of Byron was harmonized by some exquisite touch of art;— that of Shelley was Aeolian, whose strings, hanging loose and careless, lay open to every sudden gust of thought that swept from his fitful mind; and, therefore, burst in broken murmurs, not always grateful, to the ear.*

The unpremeditated quality of these melodies, he thought, rendered Shelley's poems the more effective, since it imparted to his verse "a seductive pathos, which few can tearlessly peruse."

The spirit of philanthropy, seen in sentimental retrospect, was enough to satisfy many of the later critics of Shelley, and sufficed this earlier euphuist, who ignored any less benign intellectual content in the poems.

> We trace in every sentiment he has uttered a glorious spirit of benevolence and philanthropy, which is in itself sufficient to disarm the malignity of his orthodox revilers; but whatever may have been his theological opinions, we have no intention to inquire.

The morbid tone adduced by many contemporary critics impressed this commentator, who found most of Shelley's poems

> of a gloomy and desponding cast . . . with coffins and charnels, as if his whole life had been one continued dream of the tomb.

This sort of appreciation is more significant of the critical standards of the time than of Shelley's poetry. It has been suggested elsewhere in this study that the spirit of criticism lagged behind that of the Romantic poetry in the early part of the century — that critics, educated in the school of the preceding idyllic or funereal nature poets, were better qualified to receive the Romantic element of Nature pictorialized and sentimentalized than to receive the Romantic element of iconoclastic or transcendental thought. The present essay seems an extreme example of the Criticism of Sensibility; it suggests the presence of a whole school of superficial Shelley readers and ranters who practiced the appreciation of the Shelley nature-sentimentality as a fashionable vice, to the neglect of his meaning and message. Much of the early praise of Shelley's "pure poetry" is of this over-aesthetic sort; the prevalent catalogue of "purple passages" is testimony of it. The Gothic sensibility of this critic of **The Censor,** who remarked upon Shelley's charnels rather than his Promethean promontories, who found in **The Sensitive Plant** the "talent of a botanist" with the "taste of a poet," who thrilled with the poet's ability to express the thoughts of expectant motherhood, and who thought him maddened by brooding overmuch upon the decay of all beauty, marks him as well behind the van of Romantic thought, and worlds removed from the Shelleyan idealism. It might almost have been foreseen that he would prefer the imagery and brooding sentiment of **Alastor** to all the rest of Shelley, and that he would not even mention **The Cenci, Prometheus Unbound,** or the finest of the lyrics.

The somewhat over-eloquent essay which accompanied the appearance of **The Wandering Jew** in **Fraser's Magazine** in 1831 indicated the beginnings of that sentimental legend of the poet which arose after his death and which was fostered by friends of the inner circle and periodical writers alike. The essay dealt chiefly with Shelley's poetical qualities, and mentioned some of the weaknesses that Kingsley later attacked. The poem, of course, was interesting chiefly as containing the germ of much of the poet's later work.

> That fantastic spirit which would bind all existence in the visionary chain of intellectual beauty, and the forced and distorted tenor of such a philosophy, became in Shelley the centre in which his whole intellectual and sensitive powers were united for its formation and embellishment. And although . . . he may be liable to the charge of a certain mannerism, there is not the less evident, the delicacy, elasticity, and concentration of a gentle and noble mind, a deep scorn of all that is vulgar and base, a lofty enthusiasm for liberty and the glory of his country, for science and for letters; and finally, an insatiable longing after an eternal and incorruptible being which opposed to his persuasion of the misery and nullity of the

* **The Censor,** one vol., London, 1829: "Byron and Shelley."

world, feeds and maintains that tension, or struggle; that "fire at the core" which is the inheritance of all privileged geniuses, the promoters of their age.*

In these qualities was seen the origin of the restlessness of his desire, his persistent flights into abstraction.

Comparisons of Shelley with Byron were becoming almost inevitable in the criticism of the former. By this writer Byron was seen as having had the more intellect, Shelley the more fancy. "Byron is the greater poet; Shelley the greater philanthropist." Because of the philosophical content of his poems Shelley was regarded as less direct in his appeal, and therefore perhaps less effective, than either Byron or Keats.

> Byron gives us only the world of reality: Shelley that of desire. In examining the world the former views it as the difference between man and man; the latter as the difference between man and his Creator, thus presenting the metamorphosis of the human mind, and its progress from a sensual to an intellectual state.
>
> In Byron we see the austere plastic style and vivid expression, — the vengeance which Dante, embracing in the **Inferno** the past, present, and future, exercises, in the name of universal judgment with prophetic force, but with personal hatred. In Shelley, as in the **Purgatorio,** we see the pains of the condemned in part picturesque, but the dark and fiery vapours giving place to the various play and greater pomp of the colouring; and in Wordsworth . . . the **Paradiso,** where shines the pure light . . . the intuition of perfect goodness. . . .†

This was excellent literary analogy, even though haltingly expressed, for the comparison was accurately suggestive of the cardinal differences between the two men. The idea is of the best of figurative interpretation, which adds new meaning to its subject. In this case, the elements of artistic technique on the one hand and philanthropic method on the other are subordinated with excellent imagination to the essential Shelleyan motif of suffering aspiration.

The pragmatical implications of the struggle, however, the critic could not regard as founded upon probability.

> His hypothesis of human perfectibility, and the progress from a sensual to an intellectual state in this life, which, contrary to all experience, is perpetually advocated — the consciousness of his own high aspirations teaching him "to fear himself and love all human kind" — and the attempt, though poetry should in reality be the original form of the soul, to make of idle verse, and idler prose, the framework of the universe, and to bind all possible existence in the visionary chain of ideal beauty, both were indeed equally vain and enthusiastic.‡

Thus Shelley's poetry was rigidly restricted to the domain of art, and its practical aims, other than the gratification of the aesthetic sense, were denied the probability of their mundane fulfillment. It may be suggested that, aside from its conflict with common sense, the idea of earthly perfection was in too complete antithesis to the usual concept of perfection in heaven to be admitted as other than an artistic premise. It is possible that this writer hung his case, unconsciously, upon the phrase "in this life" in the preceding passage.

In the fall and spring of 1832-'33 **Tait's Edinburgh Magazine** published an elaborate critical essay which appears to have sought to avoid the element of doctrine in Shelley's works by the use of a purely artistic definition. The poet's views seem to have been regarded as harmless, or irrelevant to critical appreciation. Although he believed that the poetry should be judged by and for itself, the essayist gave a brief sketch of the poet's life; most of the essay, however, was a poem-by-poem account of his works. Looking back with nostalgic longing upon the poetic glory of the Romantic Renaissance, the critic regarded Shelley as "by far the sweetest and most purely poetical of these sweet singers."

The biography was supplied because

> a knowledge of it is indispensable to the right understanding and appreciation of some of his works. In the second place, because both friends and foes have, in his case, mixed up the poet too much with his writings. . . . A poem, to be rightly estimated, must be judged without reference to its author as much as a painting or statue.**

The distinction between the evaluation of a poem and the understanding of it, with respect to the function of biography, was correctly made .

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* **Fraser's Magazine,** June, 1831, Vol. 3, p. 531.
† Ibid., pp. 532 and 533.
‡ Ibid., p. 534.
** **Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,** Oct.-Mar., 1832-'33, Vol. 2, pp. 92-103 and 331-342. Pp. 96-97.

This formulation of critical axioms was continued in the approach to the early poems. The earlier works were

> rather the overflowing of the thoughts, feelings, and images fermenting in his mind, than poems. A poem is a creation of art — it is the product of the imagination — a thing existing for itself. It addresses itself to the active imagination of others, or to that passive imagination which is called taste. It is like a picture or statue, an object to be contemplated, not a vehicle of instruction or instrument of persuasion. Its sole object is to please. Its moral and intellectual influence is indirect . . . suggesting to the mind thoughts and speculations which otherwise might not have occurred. . . . its merit must always be determined by the effect it produces upon the imagination.*

The allegorical elements of **Queen Mab** and **The Revolt of Islam** were therefore considered mutilations, and the tyranny of symbolism over the poet's pictorial art was much lamented. Especially were the characters of **The Revolt** thought deficient in verisimilitude.

> Unacquainted with the realities of society, Shelley fails in conveying distinct perceptions of any very great oppression from which his hero and heroine came to relieve their fellows. . . . The ameliorated social institutions which they strove to introduce, are pictured with equal faintness.†

Enough has been said of this unspecific quality of Shelley's "sociological" poems in connection with his innately abstract technique and his avowed poetic theory. It is enough to add here that while **Queen Mab** is justly subject to the charge of containing too much and too violent civil didacticism, the very premise of the essayist defends the absence from **The Revolt** of concrete social instruction, even as it predicates the indirect nature of the moral effect of poetry. The contradiction of the general law by the specific criticism serves to strengthen the former, while the latter may be regarded, nevertheless, as not wholly invalid.

In the poems of personal mood, a genus often abused by posturing and egotistic poets, the essayist believed that Shelley had peculiarly succeeded. **Alastor** he thought a picture of the poet's own mind —a poem which should be read by the light of his biography.

> The reflection of the poet's yearnings, first gives life and unity to this congregation of huge imaginings. It is the picture of his utter loneliness that constitutes its chief melancholy charm.‡

Yet he regarded it also as of universal meaning and Titanic majesty.

The second part of the essay** began with a definition of lyric poems as verses which may be set to music, the content being narrative, description, even didactic. For the composition of works of this type the essayist regarded Shelley as better fitted than any other poet of his day, though his were no "parlour songs."

Following several quotations, including "The Cloud," the writer designated Shelley's **Cyclops** translation as "almost entitled to rank as an original"; and expressed the view that it and Schiller's **The Phoenicians** were the "only versions of Greek drama that give any idea of the original."††

Dismissing **Rosalind and Helen, Adonais,** and **Hellas** with a word, he devoted the rest of his space to **The Cenci** and **Prometheus Unbound. The Cenci** was thought "worthy to rank among the most successful efforts of dramatic art in the English language"; but an expression more unusual in that time was the critic's affirmation that Shelley had manifested so fine a dramatic technique as to indicate that he was a finished author in the form as well as a finished student in the theoretical art.

> Shelley had occupied the field of the drama, and would have maintained it. He had the power of subduing the expressions of agony to the modulations of harmony, without lessening their power or diminishing the sympathy they were likely to excite. He could be alternately homely and magnificent. He knew how to check that overflowing of poetical thought which was natural to him, in order to give character to his dialogue. . . . Lastly, he saw clearly the distinction between the narrative and dramatic, and allows his characters to be seen and heard as the necessity of his art dictates.‡‡

Prometheus Unbound was regarded as not genuine drama, inasmuch as it lacked human interest and dealt not at all with the modulations of human character.

> The Prometheus is dramatic in form only; there is little or no human interest in it. The sphere of action is the universe; the actors the gigantic

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* Ibid., p. 97.
† Ibid., pp. 99-100.
‡ Ibid., p. 103.
** March, 1833.
†† Ibid., p. 335.
‡‡ Ibid., p. 335.

creatures of the poet's imagination. . . . It is indeed a gigantic work, worthy, from the might and magnitude of its conceptions, to rank beside Aeschylus. . . . The Prometheus is a poem that never can be popular. The habits of thought presupposed in those to whom it addresses itself exist only in minds which have been long devoted to literature. . . . Man being finite, cannot comprehend **infinite** good, and all attempts to clothe such an idea in bodily form must be unsuccessful.*

This essay is notable among the periodical utterances upon Shelley; first, because of its criterion of intrinsic value alone as determining the worth of a poem and the direction which critical comment ought to take; second, because of its use of definitions formulated and applied as a method of appreciative criticism. Other critics, such as Mill, began with a formulated concept of the poet's general nature, and proceeded by illustration; this writer began with definitions, stated or implied, of the various poetic types, and proceeded by application to the poems of these less personal criteria. Instead of assuming a premise about the poet's qualities and mind, this method arrives at conclusions about them, and there is no tendency to apply the thesis to its own proof. The method is one of the most interesting and valid in criticism, producing, as it does, the three-fold fruit of re-formulated concepts of poetic types and goals, the evaluation and description of poems through the application of these concepts, and the characterization of the genius and contribution of the poet under consideration.

In this instance, however, it is interesting to note that the technique in question resulted in the criticism of only the artistic element in Shelley's work. The definition which ruled out the "utilitarian" aspects of poetry forbade the consideration of that spiritual evangelism without the examination of which Shelley could never be perfectly judged.

> Our object has been to criticize the poems of a real poet as such; to banish out of view, when doing this, all reference to his moral conduct, or to his speculative opinions. The intrusion of personal feelings, the attempt to insinuate unpopular opinions, under the disguise of poetry, are a fair object of remark for the critic, when they, in any way, blemish the poem as such; not otherwise. A poem is an object of contemplation; it addresses itself to our passive imagination; it is not intended, nor, in well-regulated minds, is it calculated to influence the opinion or the will.†

The conclusion was that any person of right mind and training might love Shelley's poetry without adopting his abstract opinion. Such is almost always the modern appreciation; and this essay, in its emphasis upon the aesthetic aspect of his verse, as well as in its sanely ordered method, contributed a salutary new emphasis to criticism which was too often merely personal, or merely moral, or merely legendary.

The first article in the first number of the short-lived and ultra-conservative **Oxford University Magazine** was on **Shelley.**‡ Its purpose was to draw readers to his "beauties" and to show that in his life and person were lessons for "the sincere and affectionate Christian." The result was not a systematic or thorough criticism, but the essayist accorded pious recognition to Shelley's uprightness of character, and praised with enthusiasm parts of his poetry. After defending Shelley against the **Quarterly Review** and Oxford against Shelley, quoting the usual anthology of fine passages, and raising the old cry of "wrong principles," the author passed judgment upon the chief poems as follows:

> Of his entire poems, we should be inclined to place the "Revolt of Islam" the lowest:— and perhaps none are more perfect, than "Alastor," and "The Cenci." The latter — a magnificent tragedy — is unfortunately too long to be included in the collection of "Beauties" which for many reasons we are induced to prefer to a complete edition of his works.

Thus did a later Oxford, with qualified forgiveness, reclaim her own. The negligible quality of the essay as criticism may be sufficiently indicated by the fact that its writer thought the line

> "**Like light dissolved in star-showers,** thrown —"

"one of the most perfect in the English language."

In 1838 **Fraser's Magazine** printed an article on "The Poetry of Shelley" in which a religious philosopher, after dragging through much transcendental logic and abstract scholastic jargon, analyzed Shelley's atheism and specified his doctrinal faults.** "Our purpose is not only to make Shelley's poetry safe, but beneficial

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* Ibid., p. 338.
† Ibid., p. 343.
‡ **Oxford University Magazine,** 1834-'35. Only volume.
** **Fraser's Magazine,** June, 1838, Vol. 17, pp. 653-676. The quotation from his own translation of Aeschylus, the affiliation with **Fraser's,** and the urge to make Shelley safe for Christianity are strong indications that the author was Thomas Medwin.

reading."* The apparent contradiction of the poet's atheism by his "spiritualism" first concerned the essayist. "Shelley asserts the reality of spirit, yet seems to deny the existence of God."†

Examination of **Queen Mab** revealed that

> the Christianity to which Shelley in this and other works opposed himself, was a phantom of his own and other men's imaginations, and not the Christianity taught and illustrated in the life and character of its Divine Founder.‡

Belief in the existence of nothing but spirit might produce, the author thought, a kind of atheism, such as the Swedenborgians held, which had not learned to admit the higher source of man's divinity:

> The eternal and the infinite are the mind's own attributes; they are of it; and it is not until the man perceives that these attributes are laws of his being which he cannot claim credit for pronouncing and has not the power, though he may have the will, to break, that he is fain to confess a will of stronger potency.
>
> Shelley . . . erred in transferring merely intellectual scepticism to his moral being, which admits of none.**

Putting into the poet's mouth the words of Demogorgon, from **Prometheus Unbound,** to prove that he himself believed in a God, the essayist concluded that Shelley was denying only "the god of the sensual man," spoken of by St. Paul as "the God of this World, and the Prince of the Powers of the Air."†† Thus he preferred to interpret the Promethean myth as meaning conflict not against God but against natural law, man's nature itself being among the obstacles to be overcome.

The myth itself was regarded by the critic as

> the offspring of those transcendental ideas which belong to man as dweller of Eternity and righthand fellow of the Infinite; and the presence of which induces discontent with all temporal conditions, how perfect soever as such. . . . No institution, whether political or religious, was ever, or could be, any thing more than an approximation to the exemplar in the soul of sage, or saint, or savage. . . . Hence a wise yearning for a better state of things — an infinite, unsatisfiable desire, that expresses itself in sighs profound as Ades, and in aspirations that aim at heaven: a Titanic war, and a universal rebellion against Nature, from which the strongest giant retreats baffled, and in his agony and anguish blasphemes, or seems to blaspheme, against her Author.‡‡

The application of this to Shelley was that he had thought the world worse than it was and, in his too impatient desire for perfection, had erred in the direction of destructive fury. He had denied and obliterated, where Wordsworth had gloried in the world as it was. The essayist thought him wrong in denying all present good, as well as in believing in a temporal perfection upon earth. But he was willing to concede that there had been provocative evils in Shelley's day, and that it is well to have thunder from a philosopher now and then.

After a wonderful manipulation of abstract terminology, the essayist emerged with the conclusion that Shelley was no atheist, but a "theist."

> The philosophy both of Plato and Shelley, though different enough in many particulars, are both subject to the charge (from which one of the parties is, at least, sure of an acquittal) of **speculative** and apparent atheism; but practically, and really, they might have been, and were . . . the purest of Theists (a conclusion corroborated by the indisputable fact, that both of them were not only in their several ways the most sublime of poets, but among the best of virtuous men).***

Thus was Shelley made safe, and even instructive, for the Christian reader. Even the characters of the poems were, in some instances, brought into the fold. Though the figures in **The Revolt of Islam** seem to be atheists,

> After what we have written in this paper, the pious reader will find himself able to explain the apparent contradiction for himself; and out of its solu-

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* P. 666.
† P. 653.
‡ P. 654.
** Pp. 655 and 654.
†† This attributing of speeches in the dramatic convention to the poet himself was one of Medwin's favorite methods of argument.
‡‡ P. 661.
*** Pp. 665-666.

tion extract wholesome though bitter medicine, which shall elevate his Christianity and purify his religion.*

The Cenci was chiefly notable, in this connection, as containing, in the character of the Count, an attack on abuses of religion!

It was the prophecy of the author, in closing, that the new poetry, about to arise, would be a literature of Christian reconstruction, the moving force of which crusade had been in part provided by the aspiration of Shelley.

> Shelley was appointed to demand an impracticable purity, indeed, but still a purity which is demanded by the moral power within us; and without which it will never be satisfied; thus leading us on to an eternal standard of perfection, and to a life beyond the present.†

Much sport might be had with the inconsistencies and with the critical aim of this ambitious essay. Its method was argumentative; its purpose, to prove that Shelley's principles were consonant with the Christian spirit. It said that what the poet attacked was natural law, including the evil qualities of human nature; again, it said that what he attacked was the sensual deity of a debased religion; still again, it said that what he attacked had no existence at all, but was a phantom of the imagination. All this to insure that Shelley's attack should not appear to have been directed against institutions commonly identified with the Christian faith. The critic was right in deprecating the excess of Shelley's impatience with the social organization; he was wrong in suggesting that Shelley thought the world all evil, for it was in human nature and in the innate nobility of man that the poet discovered the germinating seeds of ultimate perfection. He was right in believing Shelley no atheist; but he employed a dubious reasoning in seeking to establish the poet's religious belief from the fact that he had led a moral life. But, most important of all, he was right in believing that the essence of the Shelleyan doctrine was its aspiring spirit, which sooner or later might awaken men to the fulfillment of their higher nature.

This while, the mighty London **Athenaeum** was sitting in scholarly judgment upon Mrs. Shelley's editions of her husband's works. Its notices were chiefly unfavorable to her work as editor; it deemed that she had been "too close to the unfinished edifice of her husband's mind." No noteworthy criticism of Shelley was here offered, except approval of his translation of Plato's **Symposium** and the casual opinion that **Prometheus** was his most sublime performance. The significant aspect of the **Athenaeum's** attitude was its calm, academic, unargumentative acceptance of Shelley as an established classic in the language, about whom the aptest learned comment to be made was that there should be a complete and perfect edition of his writings. It was assumed that readers of Shelley were such as would not be injured by his opinions. The **Athenaeum** long continued to call in a dignified way for a good edition and an adequate biography.‡

The **British and Foreign Review,** however, presented a much more ambitious essay as its review of Mrs. Shelley's 1840 edition. Its author was moved by a conscious appreciation of poetic form to seek the really fine and permanent elements in Shelley's poetry in the shorter and more perfectly finished poems. He applied to this task the healthy neo-classicist point of view which earlier had been voiced by Sir Henry Taylor in his less impersonal preface to **Philip Van Artevelde.** But the reviewer was seeking also to elucidate the spirit of Shelley's age, and to apply to its troubled romanticism the temperate judgment of the best creative theory in poetry. Finally, he was free from the argumentative taint, regarding Shelley's doctrines as evil chiefly as they rendered his art invalid.

Of the spiritual chaos and seriousness of the early years of the century he wrote:

> A desire for something more comprehensive in principle and nobler in aim than the literature of the 18th century had proposed to itself, animated the ethical and imaginative writers of the present one. It was, unconsciously to themselves, a period of transition in the intellectual world, as in the political it was a period of convulsions. Men were dissatisfied with the present: no theory, in an age most prolific in speculation, was found that would reconcile the inconsistencies perceived to exist between the spiritual wants of the time and its institutions. . . . Hence literature and philosophy betray a want of precision in form, and of proportion between what they aimed at and what they accomplished.**

The earlier French-derived criticism the critic regarded as utterly false, since it misjudged the great value of social and Christian institutions. Particularly, Shelley's youthful theories were thought bad for his art because they caused him to confuse matter of intellect with matter of poetry, and truth with falsehood.

> Shelley conceived that the noblest use of poetic powers was the recommendation of philosophic truth; but he did not sufficiently distinguish between assertive truth, which is the province of the imagination, and dis-

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* P. 666.
† P. 674.
‡ See the **Athenaeum,** Dec., 1839, pp. 939-942 and 982-985.
** **British and Foreign Review,** 1840, Vol. X, pp. 98-127. P. 104.

cursive truth, which is the business of the understanding.*

Thus his poetry was marred by the expression of too much opinion; not merely **bad** opinion but any mere matter of intellect seemed to this writer alien to the nature of poetry. His later poems, however, seemed improved in this respect; and it was judged that the argumentative passages of his work would go unnoticed by posterity. **Alastor** was regarded as his most characteristic work:

> Shelley's first poem [**Queen Mab**] is the baseless fabric of a Saturnian age; Alastor, but in a better spirit than Childe Harold, is the poet's inner-being impersonated, and brought into immediate contact with nature under her manifold vicissitudes of repose and turbulence, of luxuriant life and primeval desolation.†

For the reasons already indicated, the writer believed **Prometheus Unbound** and **The Revolt of Islam** the "least readable and permanent" of his works —

> the one, from its essentially modern spirit, embracing and embodying notions and speculations in the room of realities and truth; the other, from the comparison forced upon the reader with the dramatic treatment of the most solemn **myth** of antiquity.

In spite of the fine passages in these poems, it was thought that their political and philosophical content marred them so that there might be found "nowhere an artistic whole in the longer compositions of Shelley."‡ It was regretted that Shelley had not preferred prose to poetry as a medium for his philosophical message.

While the substance of **Prometheus** was held to be matter of poetry, the work was regarded as deficient in form and untrue to that spirit of antiquity which it was said to imitate. Shelley was convicted of a lack of artistic discipline, of failing to distinguish between the gem of poetry and its matrix:

> He had yet to learn the art of suspecting the imagery and the emotions which come unsolicited to the poet, and that it is the often-tried and tested residue of these which alone sinks into, and obtains the mastery over the inner-being of the few, and is by them gradually imparted to the many.**

Thus it was judged that, because they were free from these defects of the longer poems, Shelley's most permanent works were his shorter poems — those, perhaps, which Mrs. Shelley would have classified as purely fanciful or personal.†† From the finished brevity and innate unity of these lesser but more perfect works it was inferred that Shelley possessed imagination without "invention," and that he did his best work when symmetry and unity and unmingled poetry were thrust upon him by the circumstances of creation.

The rest of the review was given to the appreciation of the shorter poems, the discussion of **The Cenci,** and the evaluation of Shelley's influence.

The Odes were regarded as possessing the desideratum of artistic restraint; **Rosalind and Helen** was thought diffuse; the **Euganean Hills** was held to be too perfect to permit fragmentary quotation. Incidentally, Shelley was defended from the charge of Platonic mysticism, the argument being that Plato was seldom a mystic; it was held that what mysticism Shelley did have constituted a blemish upon a poetry designed for the minds of the many. **Adonais** was considered one of the most perfect of the poems, in spite of an excess of allegory, since it revived the spirit of Greek elegy. The unfinished state of many of his longer works was as if he had presented

> his "studies" only, lest his mature compositions should come upon an age too late, or a generation, like the past, too hardened in its own view to accept what seemed to him necessary for their awakening and regeneration.‡‡

The subject of **The Cenci** was thought "not necessarily repugnant to the feelings of [an age], like that of our elder dramatic literature, accustomed to the exhibition of strong passions and portentous crime." No question was made of Shelley's delicate and decorous treatment of the subject. The restraint and compression of the drama were taken to indicate that Shelley "went far to wean himself from the obscure and redundant manner of his earlier works."***

Finally, Shelley was judged to have been the greatest poetic influence of his era.

> We believe him more than any other poet of his age destined to operate upon the future poetical literature of England. . . . in Shelley are visible

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* Ibid., p. 104.
† Ibid., p. 107.
‡ Ibid., p. 110.
** Ibid., p. 113.
†† See Ch. III.
‡‡ Ibid., p. 123.
*** Ibid., p. 125.

> the germs of a future poetry more intellectual, more nearly allied to the abstract truth of universal faith and philosophy, than any that has yet appeared.
>
> His rich and exuberant imagery will re-appear under forms more chastised, and in less intricate combinations, but with something also of its original freshness fallen away. Some of his aspirations for the improvement of political institutions are already realized. Of others, and of his projects of social amelioration in general, the fallacy and incompatibility with the best interests of men are better understood than when he rashly came forward as their advocate; but with clearer perceptions there is also reason to hope that we unite a more considerate and indulgent spirit.*

This was criticism worthy of a place in permanent literature, and lacking only the measured music of the finest prose and the touch of zealous imagination which marks the finest appreciative writing. The mood was calm, intelligent, and yet impressionable; the author practised a restraint analogous to that recommended to the poet. Moral differences with the poetry, however acute, were subordinated to the task of intelligent interpretation. The interpretative method was two-fold: it involved the historical examination of the milieu out of which Shelley arose, and the application to his poetry of a generalized but irrefragable rule of creative art. The description of the earnest, enthusiastic, extravagant ethos of the romantic tendency served to **explain** Shelley; the application of the law of imaginative discipline and restraint, and of the distinction between matter of poetry and matter of philosophy, served to **evaluate** him. The essay observed the four-fold critical aim of sympathetic understanding, intelligent exegesis, aesthetic judgment, and formulation of creative theory.

The standards which it imposed are those of a classical rather than those of a romantic art, but they are hard to quarrel with in any field of creation. As applied to Shelley, they served the temperate end of demonstrating that at times his imagination broke the desirable limitations of form, and that at other times, or simultaneously, his passion for social instruction violated the aesthetic aims of poetry. That the essayist was no narrow apostle of provincialized naturalism or pedestrian versification is manifest from his belief that Shelley's short lyrics, when they were most passionate, formed themselves into organic wholes which his evangelical intellect never paralleled in the longer, more purposeful poems. It is further manifest from the fact that, having condemned the crude iconoclasm of the earlier poems, the writer recognized as proper "matter of poetry" the more restrained, though purposeful, philosophy of the later works. On the whole, the essay recognized the spiritual utility of poetry and the regenerative function of high imagination, and advocated just that degree of classicist restraint which would have been most wholesome for the tempering of Shelley's romantic excess.

Thus poetry was defined, by implication, as a symmetrical art, dealing legitimately with the materials of meditative thought, but devoted to the propagation of unquestionable truth rather than of personal doctrine. In the light of this ideal, Shelley was temperately rebuked for undisciplined fancy, lack of form, and an over-emphasized didactic message. His critic was wrong in the belief that the stripped realism of **The Cenci** marked the accession of a permanent discipline in the growth of Shelley's work, for we have seen that **The Cenci** was an "occasional" work, indicative of a conscious and momentary modification of aim and technique. He was similarly wrong in judging **Prometheus Unbound** as an imitation of the Greek tradition. But, on the whole, with respect to Shelley's art and aside from the evaluation of his message, this essayist was correct, temperate, and sympathetic. And as for his prophecy of Shelley's influence, we need look no further than Tennyson to find the survival of that delight in things imaginative and remote which, long after the romantic heat had cooled, continued to displace the poetic realism of the preceding epoch.

Aside from the periodical opinion, passages from two contrasting works of the decade preceding 1840 may be offered as providing criticism from widely differing points of view. In 1838 a "parlor" volume, containing engraved portraits of distinguished contemporary authors, included with his likeness a biographical and appreciative sketch of Shelley by Henry F. Chorley. This biographer had none of the professional impudence of the periodical men; his was a gingerly and studied attempt to do justice in drawingroom fashion to "a dreamer and a doubter," a young man whom he regarded as abnormal and unfortunate in his lack of proper environmental discipline. The sketch was in purpose mainly biographical, but with respect to the poet's philosophy and works it made at least three significant points. The first of these was the admission that Shelley's later views differed from his youthful heresies as the constructive differs from the destructive. After characterizing **Queen Mab** as the product of a "mistaken enthusiasm," all of Shelley's poems as subject to personal interpretation, and the Poet in **Alastor** as a particularly "remarkable and saddening confession" of Shelley's own nature, the author presented the philosophy of **The Revolt of Islam** in the following light:

> In its exquisite dedicatory address to his wife, and in the whole tone of its colouring and imagery, there is evidently an increase of hope and calmness on the part of the poet. He still, however, shows himself unalterably vowed to the services of his boyhood — to the preaching of a religion of

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* Ibid., p. 126.

> Love and Intellectual beauty, whose spirit should be peace and liberty, and brotherly kindness — he still is filled to overflowing with the vision of a world where should neither be sensual passion, nor hate, nor bigotry; all its inhabitants being equally divine in their strength and purity. — How different this from the negative scepticism of the mocker, who pulls down without the power or the wish to build up again!*

The second judgment was that in Shelley England had lost a mighty dramatist, in all probability; the third was that the **Ode to the West Wind,** a poem not often exalted or even mentioned by contemporary critics partial to his lyrics, should be considered his best of its kind, in certain cardinal merits:

> The Cenci, unquestionably the most powerful of modern tragedies, (the only work which we dare at a distance, compare with Shakespeare's 'Lear,' and which, by its power, and passion, and concentration, makes us mourn its author as the lost hope of modern tragedy,) is dated from Rome. . . . so is 'Julian and Maddalo,' that poem so deeply interesting as containing the portraits of its author and Lord Byron. . . . The "Ode to the West Wind" [is] the most individual and passionate of all Shelley's lyrics.†

The attitude of the author was that of one unargumentatively expressing the received opinion for a volume which had no public responsibilities to fulfill except respectability. Even though sentimental, the view of Shelley as a constructive force was more perspicacious than that held by journalistic guardians of the public weal had often proved to be. The opinion of **The Cenci** seems to have been the usual judgment of the period; but the choice of the **West Wind** reflects a discriminating personal taste: the poem **is** probably the finest of the lyrics, it is especially characteristic of the prophetic spirit of its author in its most personal utterance, and it had seldom been chosen for comment.

Our last entry preceded Chorley by four years, in the Preface by Sir Henry Taylor, author of voluminous metrical drama in the old heroic style, to his play of **Philip Van Artevelde.**‡ This was the belated death-cry of the older poetry of conventional "nature" and "human nature," as it gave way at last to the new romantic imagination. The Preface was written in the tone of one who desperately defends his citadel of legendary poetic usage against the assault of barbarians of verse. Its method of defence was to depreciate the enemy. The new poetry was represented as a lamentable but transient and unsubstantial fashion; and the critic was moved by the intimate and essential motive of self-interest to reveal its emptiness, lest his own work "occasion disappointment to the admirers of that highly-coloured poetry which has become popular in these later years."

> These poets were characterized by great sensibility and fervour, by a profusion of imagery, by force and beauty of language, and by a versification peculiarly easy and adroit and abounding in that sort of melody which, by its very obvious cadences, makes itself most pleasing to an unpractised ear. They exhibit, therefore, many of the most attractive graces and charms of poetry. . . . But from this unbounded indulgence in the mere luxuries of poetry, has there not ensued a want of adequate appreciation for its intellectual and immortal part?

"The torch-light" of this new poetry had for a time "put out the star-light" of the elder poets; but Sir Henry thought that these were returning to their place in popular appreciation after a quarter-century of obscurity.

As he saw it ,the deficiencies of the new poetry were its lack of adequate subject-matter, and the usurpation by feeling, ornamentation, and disregard of truth of the places which in poetic art should be occupied by reflection, observation, reason, wisdom, and the realities of nature. The result was "a moving and enchanting art, acting upon the fancy, the affections, the passions, but scarcely connected with the intellectual faculties."

Byron and Shelley were chosen to exemplify these shortcomings of the new poetic art. They were considered by Sir Henry Taylor the first of their time and genus, but in several points to be distinguished one from the other. He proceeded to the usual comparison of the two, his purpose being to discredit the works of both:

> Mr. Shelley was a person of a more powerful and expansive imagination than Lord Byron, but he was inferior to him in those practical abilities which (unacceptable as such an opinion may be to those who believe themselves to be writing under the guidance of inspiration) are essential to the production of consummate poetry. . . . Let no man sit down to write with the purpose of making every line and word beautiful and peculiar. The only effect of such an endeavour will be to corrupt his judgment and confound his understanding. In Mr. Shelley's case, besides an endeavour of

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* **The Authors of England: A Series of Medallion Portraits . . . with Illustrative Notices** by Henry F. Chorley, London, 1838, p. 62.

† Ibid., pp. 62-63.

‡ **The Works of Sir Henry Taylor,** London, King and Co., 1877, Vol. I, pp. v-xvi. Preface dated 1834.

this kind, there seems to have been an attempt to unrealize every object in nature, presenting them under forms and combinations in which they are never to be seen through the mere medium of our eyesight. Mr. Shelley seems to have written under the notion that no phenomena can be perfectly poetical until they shall have been so decomposed from their natural order and coherency as to be brought before the reader in the likeness of a phantasma or a vision. A poet is, in his estimation, . . . purely and pre-eminently a visionary. Much beauty, exceeding splendour of diction and imagery, cannot but be perceived in his poetry, as well as exquisite charms of versification; and a reader of an apprehensive fancy will doubtless be entranced whilst he reads; but when he shall have closed the volume and considered within himself what it has added to his stock of permanent impressions, of recurring thoughts, of pregnant recollections, he will probably find his stores in this kind no more enriched by having read Mr. Shelley's poems, than by having gazed on so many gorgeously-coloured clouds in an evening sky.

What Sir Henry Taylor objected to in the new poetry was not the presence of imagination but the absence of a corresponding element of reason and reflection. His preface was also a protest against fantastic excesses of the imaginative quality. He appeared in his time as a mighty apostle of that restraint in poetic art which we think of as classical, and which was sadly needed by the young romanticists.* The force of his opinion in his time and the extent of his contemporary reputation give weight to the belief that the "Romantic revival" was no such general and overwhelming reversal of critical values as it is commonly thought to have been. It was rather a mere matter of emphasis, in a few brilliant and unconventional poets, upon romantic imagination and iconoclastic social attitudes — in an era of social orthodoxy, poetical fixity of method and type, moral regularity, and critical conservatism. The flare of Byronism seemed to be dying away, and Sir Henry Taylor stood in his time for the old sobriety of imagination, seriousness of intellect, and restraint in technique which never completely lost its hold upon English poetry from Blair and Edward Young to Tennyson. That he failed to rise as the giant of a new classicism as conspicuous as the decadent romantic excesses was the fault of his genius and of his fate. He reminds us effectively that the file of English poetry had for the most part kept its feet upon the ground, leaving the perilous heights for heady youth to climb, confident in the stability of its march along the beaten roads of sober sentiment, wholesome thought, and naturalistic but disciplined delight.

The preceding exposition of Shelley criticism between 1818 and 1840 has sufficiently indicated that Sir Henry Taylor was with the critical majority, and that his position should be regarded less as a reaction against the Romanticist movement than as a reassertion of the critical position consistently maintained by the procession of Shelley's reviewers. The burden of responsibility was upon the new poetry, to justify itself by valid social and aesthetic contributions. The evaluation of these was to be made in terms of a critical mind prepared for romantic naturalism, respectable sentiment, and traditional philosophy, but almost totally unschooled in rebellion, transcendental fancy, and reconstructive thought. Critics of morals, almost without exception, had condemned Shelley's doctrines; Sir Henry Taylor condemned his heresies of art. His method combined generalized analysis and the appeal to history and established criteria; his critique merged the moral in the artistic concern. His appeal was for that cleansing restraint which might have improved Romanticist art, but through the conclusive application of which, Romanticism as we know it could never have emerged. His essay implied the moral responsibility of poets, and added to it the duty of mental sobriety; his attention was too fully held by Shelley's exuberance to permit the thoughtful examination of Shelley's message; his judgment, therefore, was negative in a double sense. Disapproval of the content of thought in Shelley's poetry would have been in keeping with his creed, as well as deprecation of the uses to which Shelley turned his Muse. He did not see, or chose to ignore the fact, that there was in Shelley's work, beneath the veil of his visionary world, a content of ideas more weighty in its message and implications than the sober and tasteful meditative philosophy and the goodly moral stabilities with which the older poetic fashion chiefly had to do — a preachment to be judged for good or ill. He asserted the absence of intellectual content rather than its validity or lack of validity, and in so doing, limited the valuable content of his criticism to its sound and cleansing gospel of temperance and classicist restraint.†

The criticism of the period between 1818 and 1840 was thus, on the whole, hostile to Shelley's philosophy and art. For the most part, the earlier reviews condemned

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* Cf. Hugh Walker's **Literature of the Victorian Era,** Cambridge University Press, 1921, pp. 268-270.

† The **Edinburgh Review** agreed with Taylor about Byronism, but did not mention Shelley. (October, 1834, Vol. LX, p. 1) The later **Blackwood's** ranked **Philip Van Artevelde** above the drama of Byron, Coleridge, and Shelley, and affirmed allegiance to the same poetic ideal. Of the preceding Romantic poets, it said, in connection with Taylor's play: "Nor do any of them manifest a profounder insight, or a wider view of human nature, or more frequently enunciate that **pathetic wisdom,** that mixture of feeling and sagacity, which we look upon as holding the highest place in eloquence of every description, whether prose or verse." November, 1851, Vol. LXX, p. 505.

his program of social amelioration as invalid and obscene, his specific doctrines as sources of moral corruption, and his imaginative art as a violation of received practice and authoritative dicta.

At the beginning of the period we find him identified with the Satanic school of Byronism; and we discover that this primary fallacy long obscured the purity of his philanthropic zeal. The prevalent view of poetry was one which regarded the art as a moral agency and as properly founded upon conservative interpretations of nature, human and inanimate; this made it impossible for his peculiar romanticism to be judged quite unqualifiedly upon its own merits. It proved to be in violation of current classicist and naturalistic restraint, and was at first judged by the imposition of this limiting criterion, instead of by broader concepts of poetical artistry. What early approbation it found was based upon its sheer brilliance and upon its apparent satisfaction of the current admiration of the "picturesque."

The situation among the periodicals during Shelley's last years was such as to render poetic criticism far from disinterested. Competitive jealousy, political affiliation, and the exigencies of public policy imposed compelling influences upon the periodical reviews. Thus, we have seen that the early attitude of **Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine** was determined partly by the acknowledged moral responsibilities of criticism and partly by the will of the **Magazine** to create for itself a reputation for receptivity toward genius, in specific deprecation of its narrower rivals. Its treatment of Shelley, therefore, resolved itself into a campaign of moral evangelism, which resulted in an emphatic distinction between the evil of the poet's principles and the high excellence of his creative genius. The resultant critical method consisted in the generalized praise of his talent and the equally generalized condemnation of his thought. The broadly didactic ends of Shelley's work were recognized, but these were deemed unessential to his success as an artist. As he persisted in what was regarded as an evil and self-destructive course, the current moral theory of poetic art united in **Blackwood's** with a sense of public responsibility to apply to his poetry the increasingly hostile methods of dignified reproof coupled with praise, protesting footnotes and letters, and Maginn's intemperate satire. It was late in our period before a **Blackwood's** essay on Wordsworth accorded him a certain recognition as a valid social philosopher. We have seen also how the series of official reviews was interspersed with memorial poems and fictitious Socratic dialogue; and we have observed that most of the **Blackwood's** criticism was given to the implication rather than the explicit formulation of the critical standards by which the poet was tested.

The **Edinburgh Review,** we have seen, neglected Shelley at first, and had little that was good to say about him until the appearance of Mrs. Shelley's edition of his poems, in a later and more temperate period. Macaulay rendered an incidental comparison of Shelley with Bunyan, which had to do with the dramatic reality of the poet's habitual personifications; but Macaulay offered only the most general of opinions both of Shelley's doctrines and of his poetic qualities. Hazlitt, in the same periodical, was temperamentally hostile; his method consisted in the formulation and application to Shelley, with partially correct results, of an unfavorable concept of the enthusiastic creative mind; he also related Shelley to the exuberant imagination of the Romantic tendency, and advised restraint. The later essay of **Blackwood's** written in connection with Mrs. Shelley's edition was of admirable philosophical tone, and applied the critical method of expository analysis, maintaining an excellent balance between the matter of Shelley's art and the matter of his message, and preserving an analogous proportion between specific evaluation and the formulation of standards. The criterion advanced was the prevalent one of classicist restraint in technique and the conventional treatment of man and nature.

The **Quarterly Review,** most completely abusive of all the major reviews, attacked Shelley's personal life as well as his art and doctrine, and thereby went far toward invalidating its critical methods. It employed as its technique a sort of ironical parody of ideas, justified by cunning ratiocination; and an application to a strictly aesthetic problem of the use of mathematical logic. In spite of the impropriety of this procedure, its disapproval of figurative excesses was not infrequently just.

Eleven years after Shelley's death he was acclaimed by John Stuart Mill one of England's great and permanent poets. Mill's critical method consisted in the illustration of a theory of types of the poetic mind by the use of Shelley as an example. His purpose was a narrow one, and involved only the manner of working of Shelley's imagination, but within its limitations it showed a remarkable understanding of the most characteristic quality of his genius.

The **London Magazine,** the **Literary Gazette,** the **New Monthly Magazine,** the **Monthly Review,** the **Gossip,** and the **Gentleman's Magazine** were variously hostile. The first of these accused him of vanity and perversion in writing **The Cenci** and imposed upon him the conventional limitation of poetic materials. The **Gazette,** while reviling **The Cenci** as immoral and **Prometheus Unbound** as meaningless, and employing Maginn's method of ridicule, mingled with its moral dissidence admiration of the picturesque element in Shelley's work and the application to it of the usual doctrine of restraint. The concern of the **New Monthly** with **The Cenci** was chiefly a moral one. The attitude of the **Monthly Review** was notable in that its classical ideal quarrelled not merely with the prolific fancy of Romanticism but also with the Romantic admiration and imitation of the Elizabethan masters. **The Gossip** found in **Epipsychidion** only an immoral amatory project, and was unresponsive to the ideal connotation of the poem. And the **Gentleman's Magazine** went so far as even to condemn the poetry because of rumors of the author's immorality.

Thus, by the year of his death, Shelley had become the victim of a legend of liber-

tinism, which had sprung from his early association with the Byronic group and had been extended and verified by his own iconoclastic zeal. The spiritual excellence and purity of his philanthropic passion was for a long time concealed beneath the startlingly revolutionary aspect of his opinions.

With the publications of **The Censor** and **Fraser's** in 1828 and 1831, there began to appear evidences of that sentimental legend of Shelley as an ethereal, unstudied, and benevolent genius which was fostered by members of the Shelley circle, and which extended its dubious influence over many of the writings of the following years. **The Censor** turned its back deliberately upon the probably incriminating ideas of the poet and contented itself with the subject of "sensibility." **Fraser's** perpetuated the recurrent comparison with Byron, mildly described the philosophy of Shelley as impracticable and benevolent, and brought into use the suggestive and valuable appreciative method of literary analogy.

Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, neglecting the poet's views, contributed to the criticism of individual poems what was perhaps the most valid and significant formulation of poetic definition and theory in the Shelley reviews of the period, applying its criteria to his works by the deductive method. It defined the characteristics of lyric and dramatic art, determined the function in criticism of biographical information, and expressed that belief in the essentially indirect moral efficiency of poetry which seems to have determined Shelley's later method; the application of these broad and irrefragable poetic standards resulted in a more favorable verdict upon Shelley's art than that previously handed down by the proponents of classicist naturalism.

With the later **Fraser's** appeared a tendency, long to persist, to interpret Shelley as essentially Christian, which was probably an outgrowth of the current benevolent legend. However invalid its general method, this interpretation served the important ends of clearing Shelley's motives and of demonstrating the distinction between an alleged attack upon the essential truth of religion and an evangelical opposition to its abuses in conventionalized institutions. Such criticism had, of course, to do with the social apostle rather than with the artist, and thus was outside of the rising tendency to deal primarily with Shelley's life and aesthetics rather than with his philosophy.

This phase of the story we have seen extended beyond the transitory columns of the reviews in such work as Chorley's; while the persistent assertion of the eighteenth-century poetic ideal came to an emphatic utterance with Sir Henry Taylor. Finally, there appeared in the **British and Foreign Review** of 1840 the truthful prediction that Shelley would remain significant for posterity through his poetic rather than his moral and social influence; the application to his poetry of a method of appreciation involving, with the use of a broad philosophy of art, the historical examination of the era which produced the poet; and the recognition of the Romantic years as a period of serious and idealistic, if somewhat turbid, thought.

There is thus evident in the period between 1818 and 1840 the gradual retirement of a hostile moral criticism before the advance of an attitude increasingly philosophical. A broader view of the poetic proprieties seems gradually to have emerged, although classicism persisted throughout most of these years. The passage of time and the death of controversy increasingly assisted the interpretation of the aesthetic aspect of Shelley's genius, to the obscuring of his doctrinal aims; the very friendliness of the later attitude toward him did as much to obliterate the understanding of his social ideals as the earlier reviews had done to misrepresent them. The permanent element of his art emerged; but nowhere was there a romantic criticism in interpretative sympathy with the fullest manifestations of the movement.

CHAPTER III

THE CIRCLE OF SHELLEY'S FRIENDS

If the poetry of Shelley had not been accorded increasing attention as the century wore on, the writings of the little circle of his closest friends would have served to keep his memory alive through interest in his life and personality. These writings — periodical reviews, biographies, editorial notes, and reminiscences — began to appear with the efforts of Leigh Hunt, through **The Examiner,** to augment the public recognition of the poet, and continued until the publication of Hogg's biography in 1858, Trelawney's appearances in print extending even beyond the date which marks the limit of our study. Hunt assiduously reviewed the poet's major works as they appeared, and extended his commentary in later books; Mrs. Shelley, who never wrote the life of her husband which she had planned, edited his poems and his prose, the first in 1839 and the second in 1840, and thus provided a virtually complete edition of his works; the scholarly and spirited Peacock contributed to **Fraser's Magazine** in 1858, 1860, and 1862 the papers which were later collected in his **Memoirs of Shelley;** the careless and sycophantic Thomas Medwin dealt with his distinguished cousin in his **Conversations of Lord Byron,** which began its popular career in 1824, and later expanded his "Shelley Papers" into the biography which appeared in 1847, augmenting it with thefts from right and left; Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who had described Shelley's life at Oxford from first-hand knowledge in the **New Monthly Magazine,** published in 1858, as recognized biographer of the poet, the first two volumes of a work which so displeased the Shelley family that they withdrew all material from his hands and prevented its completion; and in the same year Edward John Trelawney, picaresque adventurer and fast friend of the Shelleys in their Italian days, recorded his memories of the poet in his **Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron,** a book which was not improved by its expansion, in 1878, into the more pretentious **Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author.***

Each of these friends of Shelley had other claims upon literary attention; all were either novelists or poets; none, save Hunt, was a professional critic. All were, of course, so connected with the poet as to render the personal element prominent in their criticisms, and all were his advocates. By their intimate knowledge of him they were qualified to bring to bear upon his poetry all those critical advantages, real and specious, which accrue to the biographical method; and their writings served to perpetuate the discussion of Shelley's poetry at least as much by their intimate records of the personal Shelley as by their provocative praise of his works and genius.

In addition to the works of editorship, biography, and reminiscence put forth by these friends and associates of the poet, it seems well to consider here two biographical and critical memoirs attached by other authors to early editions of his works. They belong definitely to the criticism issuing from this circle because their contents were derived in a large measure from Mrs. Shelley and Leigh Hunt, to whom general acknowledgment was made in both memoirs. Passages in them may have been the work of Leigh Hunt; both were quoted, with no acknowledgment other than inverted commas, by Medwin in his **Life;** and the first of the two seems to have been attributed by C. S. Middleton directly to Hunt.†

The author of the first "life" of Shelley was one Cyrus Redding, whose brief sketch was attached to the Galignani edition of the poems of Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge.‡ Its purpose was to convey a brief and sympathetic account of Shelley's life, and to characterize his ideas and poetic achievement. The passages quoted are from parts not directly attributed to Mrs. Shelley or to Hunt.

The discussion of Shelley's early beliefs indicates that the writer had his own ideas as to the interpretation of Shelley's attitude toward religion:

> His notions at the University tended to atheism; and in a work which he published entitled 'Queen Mab,' it is evident that this doctrine had at one time a hold upon his mind. . . . He spoke of the commonly-received notions of God with contempt; and hence the idea that he denied the being of any superintending first cause. He was not on this head sufficiently explicit. He seemed hopeless, in moments of low spirits, of there being such a ruling power as he wished, yet he ever clung to the idea of some 'great spirit of intellectual beauty' being throughout all things.

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* For brief accounts of the lives and writings of these friends of Shelley, see Vol. I of Ingpen's edition of **The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** London and New York, Scribner's, 1909. For an interesting discussion of their personal qualities, see Mrs. Campbell's **Shelley and the Unromantics,** London, Methuen, 1924, Chapters II and III.

† See Middleton's note on a portrait of Shelley, quoted by W. E. Peck in Appendix Q, Vol. II, of his **Shelley: His Life and Work,** Boston and New York, Houghton, Mifflin, 1927.

‡ For the authorship, see J. P. Anderson's bibliography (The British Museum) in Sharp's **Life of P. B. Shelley,** London, Walter Scott, 1887, p. i. The sketch appeared in **The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. Complete in one Volume.** First ed., Paris, Galignani, 1829. It is here quoted from the Philadelphia reprint of 1832, the original edition being rare and inaccessible.

There was here no attempt to minimize the scandalous aspect of Shelley's doctrine, or to make of him a full-fledged Christian in his after-days.

Of the poet's motives in his life and art, of which the early critics were consistently conscious, he wrote:

> Shelley for ever sought to make mankind and things around him in harmony with a better state of moral existence. He was too young and inexperienced when he first acted upon this principle to perceive the obstacles which opposed the progress of his views, arising out of the usages and customs which rule mankind, and which, from the nature of things, it takes a long time to overcome.*

In his early days Shelley was impatient for the millennium, and did not expect it to arrive only by a tardy and gradual evolution.

> . . . he was a singular illustration of the force of natural genius, bursting the bonds of birth and habit, and the conventional ties of the circle in which he was born, and soaring high, under the direction of his own spirit, chartless and alone. He steered by his own ideas of justice; hence he was ever at war with things which reason and right had no hand in establishing, — radically wrong in themselves perhaps, or to be changed for the better, but by usage become second nature to society, or at least to that far larger portion of it which lives by custom alone.

This was one way of saying that Shelley never presented in his poetry direct and intellectually convincing measures for securing the ultimate ends of perfection; it wrongly suggested that Shelley's conceptions of that ultimate goodness, beauty, truth, and justice were warped by the eccentric imagination of an erratic genius.

The estimate of Shelley's virtues and weaknesses as a poet was such as Leigh Hunt might have supplied. He was thought to have had beauty of technique, sincerity, and intellect, but to have lacked the elements that secure human interest. The fault was well found, but the criticism left out of account Shelley's conception of his art, and attributed his abstract method totally to the bent of his genius, overlooking the fact that Shelley was working consciously and deliberately upon an imaginative level. It applied most aptly, of course, to those poems which Shelley expected to have immediate effect upon men's thoughts and actions; for in such as those the poet may justly be expected to use the most effective medium for his appeal.

> The writings of Shelley are too deep to be popular, but there is no reader possessing taste and judgment, who will not do homage to his pen. He was a poet of great power: he felt intensely, and his works everywhere display the ethereal spirit of genius of a rare order — abstract, perhaps, but not less powerful; his is the poetry of intellect, not that of the Lakers; his theme is the high one of intellectual nature and lofty feeling, not of wagoners or idiot children. His faults in writing are obvious, but equally so are his beauties. He is too much of a philosopher, and dwells too much upon favorite images, that draw less upon our sympathies than those of social life. His language is lofty, and no one knows better how to cull, arrange, and manage the syllables of his native tongue. He thoroughly understood metrical composition.

Finally, there was an appeal from the attacks of unjust critics, but no elaboration of comment upon individual poems.

> His 'Prometheus Unbound' is a noble work; his 'Cenci' and 'Adonais' are his principal works in point of merit. Love was one of his favorite themes, as it is with all poets, and he has ever touched it with a master-hand. The subject of the 'Cenci' is badly selected, but it is nobly written, and admirably sustained. Faults it has, but they are amply redeemed by its beauties. It is only from the false clamor raised against him during his lifetime, that his poems have not been more read. No scholar, no one having the slightest pretentions to true taste in poetry, can be without them. It may be boldly prophesied that they will one day be more read than they have ever yet been, and more understood. In no nation but England do the reading public suffer others to judge for them, and pin their ideas of the defects or beauties of their national writers upon the partial diatribes of hired pens, and the splenetic outpourings of faction.

The second of these memoirs, also quoted by Medwin in part, and derived from Hunt and Mrs. Shelley, appeared anonymously in a little volume of **The Beauties of Percy Bysshe Shelley.**† Its problems and purpose were the same as those of Reding's sketch. The other-worldliness of Shelley's meteoric genius again came to the fore; the discussion of it was at the same time a tribute and a confession of ignorance of Shelley's philosophy.

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* Cf. Mrs. Shelley's Note on **Queen Mab.**

† First edition published by Stephen Hunt, London, 1830. Quoted from the edition of Edward Lumley, London, 1831.

> Mr. Shelley's poetry is invested with a dazzling and subtle radiance, which blinds the common observer with excess of light. Piercing beyond this, we discover that the characteristics of his poetical writings are an exceeding sympathy with the whole universe, material and intellectual; an ardent desire to benefit his species; an impatience of the tyrannies and superstitions that hold them bound; and a regret that the power of one loving and enthusiastic individual is not proportioned to his will; nor his good reception with the world at all proportioned to his love.*
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> In all his writings there is a wonderfully sustained sensibility, and a language lofty and fit for it. He has the art of using the stateliest words and the most learned idioms, without incurring the charge of pedantry; so that passages of more splendid and sonorous writing are not to be selected from any writer since the time of Milton: and yet when he descends from his ideal worlds, and comes home to us in our humble bowers, and our yearnings after love and affection, he attunes the most natural feelings to a style so proportionate, and withal to a modulation so truly musical, that there is nothing to surpass it in the lyrics of Beaumont and Fletcher.
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> His thoughts, desires, and actions, were all regulated by a desire to benefit his species: his mind was ever keenly alive to the injuries and pains inflicted upon human nature; and it was his constant endeavor to uproot those deep causes of man's misery, which assume in society the forms of superstition, despotism, and slavery.†

It is probable that these sketches were dependent upon Hunt and Mrs. Shelley more for biographical fact than for interpretation, but at least one paragraph from the second memoir, relating to Shelley as a reformer, appears in Hunt's Autobiography.‡ Their method of criticism was that of summary and generalized exposition; their opinions were like Hunt's, especially in the objection to the lack of human interest in Shelley's works; the objection to the choice of the Cenci subject Hunt would at least not have put so flatly. It should be noticed, finally, that Shelley's aim of immediate reform was well understood, though not his later, subtler, and more significant purpose to improve mankind through exalted and imaginative visions of ultimate good; that emphasis tended to fall upon Shelley's earlier radicalism; that his major works, rather than his lyrics, occupied the central attention in these essays; and that both professed to deal, within their limits, with the whole meaning of the man and the poet.

JAMES HENRY LEIGH HUNT

In the midst of the storms of abuse earlier poured forth upon the poet by the **Quarterly Review,** and the half-hearted praise, mingled with condemnation of his doctrines, which descended upon him from **Blackwood's,** it is a source of no small gratification to find that Leigh Hunt,** Shelley's closest and most highly regarded friend, was also his most able and persistent defender and the most competent expositor of his message and genius. Leigh Hunt has too long been regarded as a mere fireside dilettante, perpetrator of chatty and inconsequential essays, poetaster of **vers de societe,** self-crowned monarch of a circle of smug and self-conscious literati. He emerges from his more serious periodical essays on politics and letters as a trenchant apostle of reform, an unrelenting antagonist of tyranny in government and letters, a keen and outspoken student of public affairs, a worthy arch-enemy of Gifford, Croker, and Southey, and a critic consistently correct in his evaluation of the poets of his own and earlier times. He, more than Shelley, was a martyr to the cause of social amelioration; and he was better able than Shelley to cope with the vicissitudes of the conflict. He suffered and survived the pitiful abuse of **Blackwood's,** a series of attacks almost incredibly vulgar and disgusting; he underwent

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* P. xvii.

† Pp. xvii-xviii. Medwin quoted without acknowledgment the first two of the preceding paragraphs, making some changes. See the Forman edition of his **Life of Shelley,** pp. 420-421. His modifications of this and the "poetry of intellect" passage of Redding suggest the use of a previous draft which Leigh Hunt may have written; but Medwin's known habits of writing are enough to account for the differences. There is also the question of different readings in the first editions of these memoirs, which I have not seen because of their rarity.

‡ See the following reference to Vol. II, p. 134.

** Mr. R. Brimley Johnson has recently issued an anthology of Leigh Hunt's critical and political writings, including his principal interpretations and defenses of Shelley, together with the letters (a few until this time unpublished) which record their friendship. References are given to this more accessible source (**Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** edited by R. Brimley Johnson, London, 1928, Ingpen and Grant) as well as to the **Examiner** and the **Indicator.** The reviews have been reprinted also in Edmund Blunden's **Leigh Hunt's "Examiner" Examined,** London, Cobden-Sanderson, 1928, which includes as well a sketch of the career of that periodical and of its courageous editors.

imprisonment and a fine for his criticism of the Regent,* and witnessed the similar confinement of his brother, after he himself had resigned the ownership of the **Examiner** lest both of them should suffer incarceration at the same time and the periodical perish; he sustained the trials of repeated and serious illness, both of himself and of his family; and, almost single-handed, attracted to the **Examiner** and the **Indicator** that audience of readers, drawn by his incisive discussions of current topics, which preserved those publications from the destruction that would have meant destitution to the Hunts and their two families. And he possessed that rare amalgamation of clear-sighted perception of social truth and unerring comprehension of genius in unearthly poetry which rendered him the most effective advocate whom it was Shelley's good fortune to recruit within the poet's lifetime. His recognition of Shelley's genius, as Mr. Johnson reminds us and as the columns of the **Examiner** amply testify, was immediate; and it was Hunt's privilege to observe, even before the fatal squall at Lerici, that his illustrious friend was beginning to receive the tribute that was his due.

Leight Hunt is not to be thought of as one who, by the mere lucky chance of having a great poet for his friend, happened to be foremost in rendering that poet the praise which posterity has confirmed. His exaltation of Shelley was the result not merely of a fortuitous acquaintance with the poet, coupled with the opportunity for public expression, but chiefly of a sound and discriminating critical talent which rendered his judgments of many contemporary poets consonant with the verdicts of time. It is true that he was fortunate in being associated with a number of the permanently illustrious, and that he was in peculiar agreement with Shelley's social ideals, his conceptions of social progress and reform, and his condemnation of the tyrannies of kings and priests. But it is equally evident that Hunt was a critic of original and authentic vision, that he was not always necessarily in agreement with Shelley's doctrines, and that he was a journalist distinguished by his tolerance, sympathy, and penetration, in a period of almost universal prejudice and bigotry in criticism.

His battle in behalf of Shelley was fought primarily in the pages of the **Examiner** and the **Indicator** between 1816, which was the year in which he made the poet's acquaintance, and 1822. To these defensive reviews he added a Preface for **The Mask of Anarchy,** which was published with the first issue of the poem in 1832. It was chiefly through the columns of the popular and courageous **Examiner** that he attacked the prejudice, incompetence, and misrepresentation of the **Quarterly** reviewers, to the effective vindication of Shelley's poetical doctrines and execution. Hunt's answer to the **Quarterly,** together with his following reviews of Shelley's principal poems, forms, as we are reminded by Mr. Johnson, "the only public refutation of his traducers, uttered while Shelley lived," and "a body of contemporary criticism, the only comprehensive estimate of his genius that appeared during his life."†

It was a part of Leigh Hunt's purpose in the **Examiner** to vindicate and establish the "new school of poets," in their rebellion against the riders of the couplet-Pegasus of the French school of English poetry.‡ In the issue for December the first, 1816 (No. 466) appeared an article entitled "Young Poets," by the hand of this ablest of militant critics, calling attention to the lately risen school of poetry, of a kind opposed to the excessive French influence, the only purpose of which school was

> to restore the same love of Nature, and of **thinking** instead of mere **talking,** which formerly rendered us real poets, and not mere versifying wits, and bead-rollers of couplets.**

The Edinburgh Review, said Hunt, had already acknowledged the passing of the old school; it was the function of this article briefly to notice three young writers who promised strength and leadership to the new. These were Percy Bysshe Shelley, "author of a poetical work entitled **Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude**"; John Henry Reynolds, author of **Safie;** and "the youngest of them all," John Keats, whose sonnet "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" was here quoted.†† There was no discussion of Shelley beyond the mention of his promise as "a very striking and original thinker." Hunt, the social philosopher, seems to have been struck first by the element of thought in Shelley's poetry, and second by the beauty of the poetry itself.

In the middle of the next month, Hunt published in the **Examiner** the whole of Shelley's **Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,** offering it without further comment as confirmation of the prophecy in the preceding article, and promising a review of Shelley's book. However, the next notice of Shelley in the **Examiner** was a quotation from **Laon and Cythna,** taken before the publication of the poem and, of course, before its revision and reissue as **The Revolt of Islam.**‡‡ The passage quoted consisted of the poetical description of the child Cythna, beloved sister of Laon. With this introduction, Hunt entered upon an elaborate critique of **The Revolt of Islam,** which

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* **Examiner,** March 22, 1812. See Edmund Blunden's **Leigh Hunt's "Examiner" Examined,** p. 21.

† **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 3-4.

‡ **Cf. Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 3.

** **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 5.

†† Mr. Johnson calls this "the first public reference, of approval, to Shelley's work": **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 8.

‡‡ **The Examiner,** November 30, 1817. No. 518. **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 12-13.

ran through four numbers of **The Examiner.** With this review his public criticism of Shelley's poetry began in earnest.*

The review was introduced, in the first of these numbers, by a quotation of some seven stanzas from the dramatic crux of the poem — the passage in which, as Laon ascends the pyre in self-sacrifice for the liberty of Cythna, she bursts upon the scene mounted upon a Tartar steed and strikes confusion to the hearts of the tyrant and his slavish followers. Hunt made free use, in this passage, of the critical device of italics, common in this period, for the designation of lines and phrases of peculiar beauty; his selections in this case were chiefly the striking similes of the passage:

> **There was such silence through the host, as when**
> **An earthquake trampling on some populous town,**
> **Has crushed ten thousand with one tread, and men**
> **Expect the second;**
>
> — she trembled **like one aspin pale**
> **Among the gloomy pines of a Norwegian vale.**
>
> And, like the refluence of a mighty wave
> **Sucked back into the loud sea,** the multitude
> With crushing panic, fled in terror's altered mood.

Leaving, for the time, the beauties of this passage to impress themselves upon his readers, he began his commentary in the issue of February 1.† This number was principally devoted to tracing the story of the poem, with further quotation. This expository method Hunt shared with many of the reviewers of his time, as he did the concomitant practice of presenting the reader with an anthology of glittering passages from the work under discussion. Here, however, he also anticipated the reception of the poem by several types of mind among its prospective readers, especially those whose mental attitude or ill-will or aesthetic incompetence might render them incapable of an adequate appreciation. Thus he put the carping element of his public immediately upon the defensive.

> This is an extraordinary production. The ignorant will not understand it; the idle will not take the pains to get acquainted with it; even the intelligent will be startled at first with its air of mysticism and wildness; the livelier man of the world will shake his head at it good naturedly; the sulkier one will cry out against it; the bigot will be shocked, terrified and enraged; and fall to proving all that is said against himself; the negatively virtuous will resent the little quarter that is given to mere custom; the slaves of bad customs or bad passions of any sort will either seize their weapons against it, trembling with rage or conscious worthlessness, or hope to let it quietly pass by, as an enthusiasm that must end in air; finally, the hopeless, if they are ill-tempered, will envy its hopefulness, — if good tempered, will sorrowfully anticipate its disappointment, — both from self-love, though of two different sorts; — but we will venture to say, that the intelligent and the good, who are yet healthy-minded, and who have not been so far blinded by fear and self-love as to confound superstition with desert, anger and hatred with firmness, or despondency with knowledge, will find themselves amply repaid by breaking through the outer shell of this production, even if it be with the single reflection ,that so much ardour for the happy virtues, and so much power to recommend them, have united in the same person. To will them with hope indeed is to create them; and to extend that will is the object of the writer before us.‡

This was followed by a careful review of the plot of the poem, with further quotations distinguished by italicized passages, and with an occasion stricture upon an element of artificiality or a word of praise for fine fancy or pathos.**

The installment of February 22†† was given over almost entirely to quotations from Shelley's Preface to the poem. By this device Hunt, it would seem, attempted to elucidate and justify the purpose of the work, presenting the passionate and logical prose of its author as more effective than any commentary of his own. He added to these passages merely the emphasis of occasional italics. There were thus presented Shelley's recognition of the despair that had come upon the hopeful in England as a result of the excesses of the French Revolution, his belief that this abuse of liberty would serve only to render freedom more precious and more to be sought after, and his faith in the turn of the tide toward emancipation and the heights. The poem, in Shelley's words emphasized by Hunt's italics, had been written as

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* **The Examiner,** Jan. 25, Feb. 1, Feb. 22, and March 1, 1818. **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 14-28.

† **The Examiner,** No. 527.

‡ **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 15-16.

** Note that Hunt ignored the incest theme. Cythna was no longer Laon's sister in **The Revolt of Islam.**

†† **The Examiner,** No. 530.

> "an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to **how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live.**"

It had been composed in a

> "**faith and hope in something good,** which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever totally extinguish among mankind."

And Shelley had offered a remedy which Hunt, the Liberal, was only too eager to present to his public, for he shared the optimism of the poet and was addressing his own efforts to the same high end.

> "**Can he who the day before was a trampled slave, SUDDENLY become liberal-minded, forbearing, and independent? This is the consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, and long suffering and long believing courage, and the systematic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue.** Such is the lesson which experience teaches now. . . . But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following Poem."*

But the poem itself received no attention in this number, beyond the statement of its aim and ideal. Hunt had not only discovered a young poet of genius who was possessed of his own ideals and eager to put them into poetry; he was not merely presenting such a poet to well-merited public attention. He was making that very poet's Preface on liberty and the hopes and fears of man appear publicly as a vigorous treatise on the times (which indeed it was, though not of a journalist sort), and serve the triple end of public encouragement, journalistic appeal, and illustration of newly arisen genius. We may suppose that on that day Hunt felt his stint for **The Examiner** well done, and that by another hand than his — a hand whose characters he would see inscribed on the hearts of his countrymen.

On the first of March Hunt's commentary proper began, with a discussion of Shelley's philosophy as revealed in this poem, the poet's outlook on the world, the probable objections of the worldly to its idealistic philosophy, Shelley's faith and opinions, and the beauties and defects of the poem. Although the reviewer again anticipated the carpings of the fault-finders, this review must be classified as constructive rather then defensive. The duel with the **Quarterly Review** over this same work had not yet arisen.

Shelley was here presented as one who did not aim at absolute perfection in the world, but who urged men consistently toward that distant goal and saw them cleansed by aspiration toward perfection, if not rewarded by its immediate realization.

> Mr. Shelley is of opinion with many others that the world is a very beautiful one externally, but wants a good deal of mending with respect to its mind and habits; and for this purpose he would quash as many cold and selfish passions as possible, and rouse up the gentle element of love, till it gets our earth rolling more harmoniously.†

But to a writer of this sort the world commonly makes objection that he aims at an idle dream and deceives himself with wild romanticism; the dull, the sceptical, the egotistic, and the bigoted have each a ready objection against such dreamers. To these Hunt commended the example and precept of Jesus Christ, who once recommended love as the law supreme, and urged it to a degree held to be impracticable. For the orthodox narrow he had this:

> How far it has been found impracticable, in consequence of his [Christ's] doctrines having been mixed up with contradictions and threatening dogmas, and with a system of afterlife which contradicts all its principles, may be left to the consideration.‡

For it was a faith similar to that of Christ which Shelley was advocating.

> "Have faith," says the philosopher, "and begin to be happier now, and do not attribute odious qualities to any one."**

The single-handed idealist, said Hunt, has always been scoffed at and opposed, but often in the past has moved the world for great and lasting good.

In passing on to Shelley's views, Hunt preferred to clear the ground for their reception and to specify the evils to which they were opposed, rather than to enumerate the opinions themselves. This was the strategy of a skillful advocate, who chose to arraign the admitted ills under attack rather than to startle and alienate his readers

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* **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 20-23.
† Ibid., pp. 23-24.
‡ P. 24.
** P. 25.

by the bald statement of the apparently or really unorthodox principles by which these ills were to be subjugated.

> It may be briefly repeated, that they are at war with injustice, violence, and selfishness of every species, however disguised;— that they represent, in a very striking light, the folly and misery of systems, either practical or theoretical, which go upon penal and resentful grounds, and add "pain to pain"; and that they would have men, instead of worshipping tyrannies and terrors of any sort, worship goodness and gladness, diminish the vices and sorrows made by custom only, encourage the virtues and enjoyments which mutual benevolence may realize; and in short, make the best and utmost of this world, as well as hope for another.*

The beauties of the poem, he thought, consisted in "depth of sentiment, in grandeur of imagery, and a versification remarkably sweet, various, and noble, like the placid playing of a great organ." Hunt found two "very opposite" parallels: Lucretius and Dante. The comparison with Dante suggests that Hunt's much-remarked dislike of the great Italian† did not extend to the denial of his genius, and that it may have had some basis in the "superstition" of his greatest work, which might naturally, if quite illogically, alienate the fullest affection of a young English liberal whose work in life was to combat all hurtful dogmas of the Church and State. Shelley Hunt thought like Lucretius in the "boldness of his speculations, and in his love of virtue, of external nature, and of love itself." But, with respect to Dante:

> It is his gloomier or more imaginative passages that sometimes remind us of Dante. The sort of supernatural architecture in which he delights has in particular the grandeur as well as obscurity of that great genius, to whom however he presents this remarkable and instructive contrast, that superstition and pain and injustice go hand in hand even in the pleasantest parts of Dante, like the three Furies, while philosophy, pleasure, and justice, smile through the most painful passages of our author, like the three Graces.‡

In summary of Shelley's defects, and in prophecy of his future distinction, Hunt observed that the poet had failed to use in this poem the concreteness and knowledge of things and men necessary to any appeal to mankind through common experience. A similar criticism persists in Shelley appreciation until this day, and justly; this one pointed to a salient difference between the minds of the poet and his friend. Leigh Hunt seems to have been endowed with all that was necessary for the perfect knowledge of Shelley except a mind for the abstract, the lack of which in many and many a reader has precluded the fullest appreciation of the "pard-like spirit."

> Mr. Shelley's defects as a poet are obscurity, inartificial and yet no natural economy, violation of costume, and too great a sameness and gratuitousness of image and metaphor, and of image and metaphor too drawn from the elements, particularly the sea. The book is full of humanity; and yet it certainly does not go the best way to work of appealing to it through the medium of its common knowledges. . . . It may set others thinking and writing, and we have no doubt will do so . . . but the author must forget his metaphysics and seasides a little more in his future works, and give full effect to that nice knowledge of men and things which he otherwise really possesses to an extraordinary degree. We have no doubt he is destined to be one of the leading spirits of his age, and indeed has already fallen into his place as such; but however resolute as to his object, he will only be doing it justice to take the most effectual means in his power to forward it.**

But it is only fair to notice that Hunt was here writing publicly for the purpose of securing a hearing for Shelley, and that he was concerned, perhaps, not so much with the mere recognition of sheer poetic quality as with the effective propagation of those philosophies of human amelioration which he shared with the poet. And it should be observed that he did not accuse Shelley of lacking the "knowledge of men and things" necessary for effectual appeal to minds of concrete habit, but merely of failing to use in his poetry his knowledge of earthly reality.

Before the next notice of Shelley in **The Examiner,** Leigh Hunt encountered the notorious attack upon **The Revolt of Islam,** now known to have been written by John Taylor Coleridge, in the **Quarterly Review.** The result was a defense of the poet, written in Hunt's best polemical style, which ran through three numbers of **The Examiner.**†† These articles were more concerned with the writers of the **Quarterly** than with Shelley, and administered an effective chastisement to these enemies of liberality and genius, but without intemperate rage or loss of dignity. Hunt had found the offending Shelley article among other contributions to the **Quarterly** which he deemed excellent. "Heavy, and swelling, and soft with venom, it [the Shelley

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* P. 26-27.
† See Saintsbury's **History of Criticism,** Vol. III, p. 247.
‡ **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 27.
** Ibid., pp. 27-28.
†† Sept. 26, Oct. 3, Oct. 10, 1819.

review] creeps through the middle of it [the **Quarterly**] like a skulking toad."* The offending critic had taken, as Hunt thought, an unfair advantage in choosing to assault the original **Laon and Cythna,** which had had almost no circulation before its suppression by Shelley and his publisher, and could consequently have done little damage to the public morals.

> And yet the Quarterly Reviewers, who think these theories so pernicious, drag forth the impression, in order to abuse what he has not used. If on the other hand, he had not suppressed it, then the cry would have been — Surely he ought at least to have suppressed this; — and he would have been reproached for what he did use.†

In illustration of the blindness and prejudice of the **Quarterly** Hunt selected its question as to what the subjects of the English constitution were expected to learn from a story laid in a Mohammedan setting, and the objection to Shelley's designation of his school life as a "world of woes" in which masters and fellow pupils were "tyrants" and "enemies." Hunt answered the latter of these assaults by quoting certain verses vigorously condemnatory of the public schools, and, after leading his readers to think that these lines were from Shelley, triumphantly announcing "the pious Cowper" as their author. Of the stupidity of the first objection, he had this to say:

> The Reviewer might as well ask what we learnt from any other fiction, which was to apply without being literal. Mr. Shelley is not bound to answer for his critic's stupidity. The reader of Gulliver's Travels might as well ask how big or little men applied to **him,** he being neither as tall as a church nor as short as a molehill. The Editor of the Review himself, for instance, might as well ask how Mr. Hazlitt's appellation of **Grildrig** applied to him, — his name being not Grildrig, but Gifford; and he never having stood in the hand of an enormous prince, though he has licked the feet of petty ones, and thrown stones at their discarded mistresses' crutches.‡

In the next issue of **The Examiner** (Oct. 3) the defense was resumed with an interesting comparison of the "Christianity" of the Reviewers to that of Shelley. Here Hunt was especially happy in his double purpose of exposing the petty practices of the **Quarterly Review** and justifying Shelley's doctrines before the world. He showed emphatically that Shelley was Christian in motive, spirit, and philosophy, the while exposing enough of the practices of the reviewers to show conclusively that they were not. The **Quarterly** had asserted that Shelley might profit by reading the Bible; Hunt challenged the **Quarterly** to marshal enough priests in its combined following to match Shelley's knowledge of that Book. And he added to the list of the **Quarterly's** offenses against Christian benevolence the indictment of having misinterpreted Shelley's lines in such a way as to represent his teachings as unChristian. The discussion provided an interesting exegesis of a moot passage in **The Revolt of Islam,** which had been quoted "with horrified Italics" by the **Review:**

> Nor hate another's crime, nor loathe thine own.
> And love of joy can make the foulest breast
> A paradise of flowers, where peace might build
> her nest.

Of these three lines, and in exposition of Shelley's essentially Christian views, Hunt wrote as follows:

> What is this first passage but the story of the woman taken in adultery? And what the second, but the story of Mary Magdalen, "out of whom went seven devils," and who was forgiven because "she loved much"? Mr. Shelley may think that the sexual intercourse might be altered much for the better, so as to diminish the dreadful evils to which it is now subject. His opinions on that matter, however denounced or misrepresented, he shares in common with some of the best and wisest names in philosophy, from Plato down to Condorcet. It has been doubted by Doctors of the Church, whether Christ himself thought on these matters as the Jews did. But be this as it may, it does not hurt the parallel spirit of the passages. The Jews were told "not to hate another's crime.' ' The woman was told not to loathe her sin, but simply not to repeat it; and was dismissed gently with these remarkable words, — "Has any man condemned thee? No, Lord. Neither do I condemn thee." Meaning, on the most impartial construction, that if no man had brought her before a judge to be condemned, neither would he be the judge to condemn her. She sinned, because she violated the conventional ideas of virtue, and thus hazarded unhappiness to others, who had not been educated in a different opinion; but the goodness of the opinion itself is left doubtful. It is to the spirit of Christ's actions and theories that we look, and not to the comments or contradictions even of apostles. It was a very general spirit, if it was anything, going upon the sympathetic

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* **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 29.
† **The Examiner,** No. 613. **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 30.
‡ **The Examiner,** No. 613. **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 31.

excess, instead of the anti-pathetic — notoriously opposed to existing establishments, and reviled with every term of opprobrium by the Scribes and Pharisees then flourishing. If Mr. Shelley's theological notions run counter to those which have been built upon the supposed notions of Christ, we have no hesitation in saying that the moral spirit of his philosophy approaches infinitely nearer to that Christian benevolence so much preached and so little practised, than any of the most orthodox dogmas ever published. The Reviewers with their usual anti-christian falsehood say that he recommends people to "hate no crime" and "abstain from no gratification." In the Christian sense he **does** tell them to "hate no crime"; and in a sense as benevolent, he does tell them to "abstain from no gratification." But a world of gratification is shut out from his code, which the Reviewer would hate to be debarred from. . . . Hear the end of the Preface to **The Revolt of Islam.** "I have avoided all **flattery** to those violent and malignant passions of our nature, which are ever on the watch to mingle with and to alloy the most beneficial innovations. **There is no quarter given to Revenge, Envy, or Prejudice.** Love is celebrated every where as the sole law which should govern the moral world." Now, if Envy is rather tormenting to ye, Messieurs Reviewers, there is some little gratification, is there not, in Revenge? and some little gratifying profit or so in Prejudice? "Speak, Grildrig."*

In the very next issue (Oct. 10, No. 615) Hunt concluded his rebuttal by defending Shelley's character and private life from the slanderous accusations of his foes. He had known and lived with Shelley, and was able truthfully and emphatically to represent him as a man of singularly pure and even ascetic life, and thus to answer the charge, made by the Reviewer, that Shelley was "shamefully dissolute in his conduct." But of more immediate interest here is Hunt's position in maintaining that matters of private behavior on the part of an author are not relevant to the public criticism of his work. He might have gone further and said that the facts of a poet's life, whether scandalous or highly creditable, are utterly valueless in the appraising of the worth of his poetry, though they may be useful for understanding the work or the method of its composition.

In his faith in the essential truth and value of Shelley's revolutionary ideas, though he said he did not believe in every detail of every one of the poet's theories, Leigh Hunt stands alone among those of Shelley's contemporaries who found something in his poetry to praise. He was a man more orthodox of mind than Shelley, and sometimes strained a bit to prove his friend a Christian philosopher, though he seems always to have been sincere in believing him one. He was loath to accept, or else he did not see, the more purely pagan element in Shelley's verse. But he was unquestionably right in maintaining that Shelley's spirit and best idealism were Christian in their essence, while his belief in the soundness of Shelley's innovations has received confirmation in some of the best modern criticism and in some instances of modern social practice.†

In Hunt's notice of **Rosalind and Helen,** which he called "another poem in behalf of liberality of sentiment and the deification of love," there occurred an interesting comparison of Shelley with Wordsworth, which emphasizes the jubilant optimism of the younger poet and its contrast with the despair of the disillusioned Laker. The poem in question was Wordsworth's **Peter Bell.**

> The object of Mr. Wordsworth's administrations of melancholy is to make men timid, servile, and (considering his religion) selfish:— that of Mr. Shelley's, to render them fearless, independent, affectionate, infinitely social. You might be made to worship a devil by the process of Mr. Wordsworth's philosophy; by that of Mr. Shelley, you might re-seat a dethroned goodness. The Poet of the Lakes always carries his egotism and "saving knowledge" about with him, and unless he has the settlement of the matter, will go in a pet and plant himself by the side of the oldest tyrannies and slaveries; — our Cosmopolite-Poet would evidently die with pleasure to all personal identity, could he but see his fellow-creatures reasonable and happy. He has no sort of respect, real or sullen, for mere power and success. It does not affect him in it's most powerful shapes; and he is inclined to come to no compromise with it; he wants others happy, not himself privileged. — But comparisons are never so odious, as when they serve to contrast two spirits who ought to have agreed.
>
> Mr. Wordsworth has become hopeless of this world, and therefore would make everybody else so; — Mr. Shelley is superior to hopelessness itself; and does not see why all happiness and all strength is to be bounded by what he himself can feel or can effect.‡

Hunt ranked **Rosalind and Helen** above **The Revolt of Islam,** because of its more

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* **The Examiner,** No. 614, Oct. 3. **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 34-35.

† Cf. Henry S. Salt's **Shelley's Principles,** and Melvin T. Solve's **Shelley: His Theory of Poetry,** Chicago, 1927, pp. x-xi.

‡ **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 41-42.

popular appeal, and added another comment on Shelley's poetical consciousness of the external world.

> Upon the whole, with all our admiration of the **Revolt of Islam,** we think that **Rosalind and Helen** contains, for the size, a still finer and more various, as well as a more popular, style of poetry. The humanity is brought nearer to us, while the abstractions remain as lofty and noble. Mr. Shelley seems to look at Nature with such an earnest and intense love, that at last if she does not break her ancient silence, she returns him look for look. She seems to say to him, "You know me, if others do not." For him, if for any poet that ever lived, the beauty of the external world has an answering heart, and the very whispers of the wind a meaning. Things, with mankind in general, are mere words; they have only a few paltry commonplaces about them, and see only the surface of those. To Mr. Shelley, all that exists, exists indeed, — colour, sound, motion, thought, sentiment, the lofty and the humble, great and small, detail and generality, — from the beauties of a blade of grass or the most evanescent tint of a cloud, to the heart of man which he would elevate, and the mysterious spirit of the universe which he would seat above worship itself.*

The **Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills** were also here presented to the public, with the remark that "some of them are among the grandest if not the deepest that Mr. Shelley has produced, with a stately stepping in the measure."

The Cenci, which, in spite of its repulsive subject, came to be regarded by a few critics in the years following Shelley's death as very near the summit of his poetic achievement, received its due meed of publicity at the hand of Leigh Hunt in spring and summer issues of both **The Examiner** and **The Indicator** for the year of 1820. "Literary Notices"† contained the first of three important papers devoted by him to this play, which, as we would expect, appealed to the exoteric mind of Hunt by its treatment of the materials of earthly reality. In this first notice he wrote:

> Of Mr. Shelley's Tragedy, called the **Cenci,** which to say the least of it, is undoubtedly the greatest dramatic production of the day, we shall speak at large in a week or two. It is founded on a most terrific family story, which actually took place in Italy: but sentiments of the most amiable, and refreshing, exalting nature nevertheless breathe in a certain undertone of suggestion through the whole of it, as they always do in the works of this author.

The way for the major review was further made ready by the second paper on the play,‡ which contained the narrative of the Cenci story; this use of space in a "miscellany" not usually devoted to criticism was justified by Hunt's avowed intention "now and then to notice some new and excellent work, or to vindicate some great endeavours on the part of a friend, the nature of which may require a more than ordinary introduction to the public."

With this much by way of preparing the public for its reception, the real review was published in the next number of **The Indicator,**** under the title "The Destruction of the Cenci Family, and Tragedy on that Subject." In the light of the historic objection to that drama, it is at once noticeable that Hunt made no reference to the incest theme. He began with a quotation from Shelley's Preface, on the relation of the drama to moral instruction and dogma, followed this with a good word for the prefaces themselves, marked Shelley's consistent use in the play of the materials of human experience, and came finally to his matter, which was the discussion of the two chief characters and the exhibition of the usual gallery of purple passages. He made the character of the Count turn upon the fault of atheism rather than incest, and created thus the opportunity of clarifying that much-debated term, at the same time remaining true to the Shelleyan concept by revealing that the significant evil of Cenci's character went far deeper than its mere fortuitous expression in what Shelley was inclined to regard as a crime chiefly against convention. As was his custom, he allowed Shelley's preface to speak for itself whenever possible, and took as his own functions those of emphasis and approbation.

> "The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama [Hunt quotes from Shelley's Preface], is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant, and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well; but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them. Undoubtedly, no person can be truly dishonoured by the act of another; and the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by love and peace. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner, she would have been wiser and better; but she

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* **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 44.
† **The Examiner,** No. 27, March 19, 1820.
‡ **The Indicator,** No. XLI., Wednesday, July 19, 1820.
** No. XLII, July 26, 1820.

would never have been a tragic character. . . . It is in the restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and revenge; that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists."*

Thus early did Leigh Hunt recognize the beauty of Shelley's prose. While he used the prefaces chiefly as Shelley intended them — as expository introductions to the poems — he presented them also as distinguished examples of creative thought and language. The comment which follows this extract is significant for the understanding of Hunt's broad appreciation of the poet, and reminds us that not even today has the fine clarity of Shelley's prose received its deserved appreciation. Hunt calls the composition in question

> — a preface beautiful for the majestic sweetness of its diction, and still more lovely for the sentiments that flow forth from it. There is no living author, who writes a preface like Mr. Shelley. The intense interest which he takes in his subject, the consciousness he has upon him nevertheless of the interests of the surrounding world, and the natural dignity with which a poet and philosopher, sure of his own motives, presents himself to the chance of being doubted by those whom he would benefit, casts about it an inexpressible air of amiableness and power. To be able to read such a preface, and differ with it is not easy; but to be able to read it, and then go and abuse the author's intentions, shews a deplorable habit of being in the wrong.†

To the characters of the old story, as they really were, for right or wrong, Shelley

> has only added so much poetry and imagination as is requisite to refresh the spirit, when a story so appalling is told at such length as to become a book.‡

The story had already been presented in prose narrative to the readers of this review. Slight deviation had been made in the play from the facts of that account. The story had not been permitted to supply a physical consummation of the sort necessary for stage success, but the spiritual conclusion of the tragedy was manifest and effective when the work was read as a tragic poem.

> The curtain falls on the parties as they go forth to execution, — an ending which would hardly have done well on the stage, though for different reasons, any more than the nature of the main story. But through the medium of perusal, it has a very good as well as novel effect. The execution seems a supererogation, compared with it. The patience, that has followed upon the excess of the sorrow, has put the tragedy of it at rest.**

Thus, **The Cenci** did not at this time impress Leigh Hunt as a good stage play, for reasons structural as well as moral.

The fact that the Catholic narrator of the Cenci story had, according to Hunt, found the Count's chief moral fault to consist in his atheism provided Hunt with a text most relevant to the reputation of Shelley. He found that the word "atheism" had more than one meaning, and that one kind of atheism was not incompatible with one kind of religion. His discussion of the term was calculated to defend Shelley, especially against the less truly Christian devotees of a bigoted religion. To this end, Hunt used here, as elsewhere, the practice of associating Shelley's acts and beliefs with those of great philosophers and poets of the past, whose departures from orthodoxy time had reconciled.

> The atheism of men like Spinoza is nothing but a vivid sense of the universe about them, trying to distinguish the mystery of its operations from the ordinary, and as they think pernicious anthropomorphism, in which our egotism envelopes it. But the atheism of such men as Cenci is the only real atheism; that is to say, it is the only real disbelief in any great and good thing, physical or moral. For the same reason, there is more atheism, to all intents and purposes of virtuous and useful belief, in some bad religions however devout, than in some supposed absences of religion: for the god they propose to themselves does not rise above the level of the world they live in, except in power like a Roman Emperor; so that there is nothing to them really outside of this world, at last. . . . One act of kindness, one impulse of universal benevolence, as recommended by the true spirit of Jesus, is more grand and godlike than all the degrading ideas of the Supreme Being, which fear and slavery have tried to build up to heaven. . . .
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> The vices of his [Cenci's] atheism and the vices of his superstition would,

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* **Shelley-Leigh Hunt**, p. 48.
† Ibid., p. 49.
‡ Ibid., p. 49.
** Ibid., p. 49.

in a spirit of his temper and education, have alike been the result of a pernicious system of religious faith, which rendered the Divine Being gross enough to be disbelieved by any one, and imitated and bribed by the wicked. . . . — still the habitual instinct of his conduct is justly traceable to the prevailing feeling respecting religion, especially as it appears that he "established masses for the peace of his soul." . . . — such religions in furnishing men with excuse and absolution, do but behave with something like decent kindness; for they are bound to do what they can for the vices they produce. And we may say it with gravity too. Forgiveness will make its way some how every where, and it is lucky that it will do so. But it would ,be luckier, if systems made less to forgive.*

Thus Hunt became a first-class Shelleyan atheist, though he defined this so-called atheism in a more temperate fashion than Shelley would have used (a manner which may be called a rationalization after the fact), and seemed never to share that sparkling paganism which was the result of his friend's bent for rebellion and his more passionate spirit.

In supplementing Shelley's discussion of Beatrice, he touched upon the most provocative point in her character, her persistent denial of guilt in the face of the external fact of crime committed. He would excuse her rather more than Shelley, who never insisted upon — in fact, specifically denied — her moral perfection.† But the defense of Shelley Hunt was tempted to extend to Shelley's creations.

> It is thought by some, that she ought not to deny her guilt as she does; — that she ought not, at any rate to deny the deed, whatever she may think of the guilt. But this, in our opinion, is one of the author's happeist subleties. She is naturally so abhorrent from guilt, — she feels it [to] have been so impossible a thing to have killed a FATHER, truly so called, that what with her horror of the deed and of the infamy attending it, she would almost persuade herself as well as others, that no such thing had actually taken place, — that it was a notion, a horrid dream, a thing to be gratuitously cancelled from people's minds, a necessity which they were all to agree had existed but was not to be spoken of, a crime which to punish was to proclaim and make real, — any thing, in short, but that a daughter had killed her father. It is a lie told, as it were, for the sake of nature, to save it the shame of a greater contradiction. If any feeling less great and spiritual, any dread of a pettier pain, appears at last to be suffered by the author to mingle with it, a little common frailty and inconsistency only renders the character more human, and may be allowed a young creature about to be cut off in the bloom of life, who shews such an agonized wish that virtue should survive guilt and despair."‡

Whatever one may think of the logic of the last sentence, and the motive behind this defence, it would appear that Hunt approached the truth. It is certainly not necessary to defend a dramatist from the accusation of having created a character with moral imperfections, even when the sympathy of the reader is intended to be drawn to that character. But, as Hunt implied, and as Shelley had stated, Beatrice was not a simple character — she was more complex, for instance, than she was later represented to have been by an eminent Victorian critic who had a theory to establish.

Descriptive passages, and a few which movingly represented passion and fear, were next given by Hunt as illustrating the "beauties" of the poem; and the last of these, which was the final passage of the play, was followed by the critic's summary:

> Mr. Shelley, in this work, reminds us of some of the most strenuous and daring of our old dramatists, not by any means as an imitator, though he has studied them, but as a bold, elemental imagination, and a framer of "mighty lines." He possesses, also, however, what those to whom we more particularly allude did not possess, great sweetness of nature, and enthusiasm for good; and his style is, as it ought to be, the offspring of this high mixture. It disproves the adage of the Latin poet. Majesty and Love do sit on one throne in the lofty buildings of his poetry; and they will be found there, at a late and we trust a happier day, on a seat immortal as themselves.**

In June and July of the year of the poet's death, **Prometheus Unbound**, the **Ode to a Skylark**, and **Adonais** provided Leigh Hunt with his texts from Shelley.†† The first letter on the **Prometheus** was a splendid example of Hunt's best fighting style. It was titled "On the Quarterly Review." Though there was no mention of the poem itself in this letter ,the writing had been provoked by the "pretended re-

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* **Shelley-Leigh Hunt**, pp. 50-51.
† See Preface to **The Cenci.**
‡ **Shelley-Leigh Hunt**, pp. 51-52.
** Ibid., p. 57.
†† **Prometheus Unbound** and the **Ode** were reviewed in "Letters to the readers of The Examiner," Nos. 3, 4, 5, on June 9, June 16, and June 23, 1822. **Adonais** occupied the sixth letter: July 7, 1822.

view" of **Prometheus Unbound** which Hunt had seen in the **Quarterly.** The preceding articles seem to have been written in the period of Hunt's difficulties, when, as he said in a letter to Shelley, his head was "continually bruised with work"; this last review, in the exuberant hopes of the Italian expedition and the promise of rehabilitation for the harassed family of Hunt.

The first of these letters is interesting chiefly as an example of his militant manner. It was a most clever, though temperate, attack upon the writers of the **Quarterly Review.** In spite of its partisan purposes, it throws a revealing light upon the maze of political obligation and favoritism which enmeshed the workings of the journals of the period. At the same time it offers convincing evidence of the validity of Hunt's judgment in the appraisal of his literary contemporaries, for it could hardly have been a sheer accident that he is found on the side of those whose permanence time has attested. We have seen his interpretation of Shelley. He could also see the eminence of Hazlitt as opposed to Gifford, and of Keats over against Milman, and of Wordsworth, and of Scott, and, in a measure, of Southey, as contrasted with the nonentities puffed by the **Quarterly.** And all this is significant in proving that his advocacy of Shelley was more than merely an accident of friendship.

As to the guile and inauthenticity of the **Quarterly** reviews, Hunt accused that journal of slavish subservience to the power of government opinion, of featuring commonplace talent for the gratification of commonplace taste, of partiality to authors of social position and agreeable political views, and of unfair depreciation of those writers whose views of state affairs were unorthodox, or who had received the favor of a rival review.

In the second letter, entitled "Prometheus Unbound," he accused the **Quarterly** specifically of malicious misrepresentation of passages in the poem, intended to prove Shelley a blasphemer against the Christian faith. Hunt suspected that a priest had been set to catch a poet, and, knowing of previous instances of such dishonesty on the part of the **Quarterly,** he did not hesitate to point out that when the reviewer changed the poet's lines, printed

> O, that the free would stamp the impious name
> Of **** into the dust!

to read

> O, that the free would stamp the impious name
> Of ****** into the dust.'

the despicable purpose was to alter the reference to a "civil title" in such a way as to suggest a blasphemous reference to Christ. Hunt knew too well the ways of the **Review** to suppose, as he thought innocent readers might have been intended to suppose, that this alteration was a mere random inaccuracy, and he lost no time in educating his readers in the ways of the wicked.

The second misrepresentation was of the facile sort that results from the separation of a passage from its explanatory context, and Hunt's refutation consisted in restoring the amputated lines to the passage which originally gave them meaning and to their proper relationship to the poet's philosophy. He quoted the pernicious words of the Reviewer:

> "After a revolting description of the death of our Saviour, introduced **merely** for the sake of intimating that **the religion he preached is the great source of human misery and vice,** Mr. Shelley adds,
>
> — 'Thy name I will not speak,
> It hath become a curse.'
>
> Will Mr. Shelley, to excuse this blasphemy against the name **in which all the nations of the earth shall be made blessed,** pretend that these are the words of **Prometheus,** not of the poet?"

Said Hunt:

> It is the critic who pretends in this case. He pretends that Mr. Shelley has "added" nothing further; that he has not explained **how** the name in question has become a curse;— and that he has not "intimated," that the religion he preached has been turned against its very essence by those who pretend to preach it in modern times. Who would suppose, from the Reviewer's quotation, that Mr. Shelley, in this very passage, is instancing Christ as a specimen of the fate of benevolent reformers? . . . All that he meant in short is this, — that as Christ's benevolence subjected him to the torments he endured, so the uncharitable dogmas produced by those who make a **sine qua non** of the Christian **faith,** have hitherto done more harm than good to mankind; and all the rest of his poem may be said to be occupied in shewing, that it is benevolence, as opposed to faith, which will survive these horrible consequences of its associate, and make more than amends for them.*

* Ibid., pp. 66-67.

Then, after quoting at length the passage from **Prometheus** which substantiated this view, Hunt concluded the letter with mention of some of the faults which might justly have been found with the poem, and with Shelley's poetry in general.

> I will concede to anybody who requires it, that Mr. Shelley, from the excess of his wishes on this point, is too apt to draw descriptions of the state of mankind without sufficient light on his canvas; but in the lesser extent to which they do apply — (and Heaven knows it is wide enough) — let the reader judge for himself how applicable they are. I will also concede to the Quarterly Reviewer, that Mr. Shelley's poetry is often of too abstract and metaphysical a cast; that it is apt to be too wilful and gratuitous in its metaphors; and that it would be better if he did not write metaphysics and polemics in verse, but kept his poetry for more fitting subjects. But let the reader judge, by this passage out of one of his poems least calculated to be popular, whether "all" his poetry is the nonsense the Reviewer pretends it to be. The Reviewer says that the above picture of the death of Christ is "revolting." The power of exciting pity and terror may perhaps be revolting to the mind of one who cannot "go and do so likewise"; but I will tell him what is a great deal more revolting to the minds of mankind in general, however priest-ridden or pension-ridden,— the feelings that induced the Reviewer to omit the passage which I have marked.*

The third letter concerned itself with the charges that Shelley's poetry was obscure and meaningless and that nowhere in his book was to be found "one simple expression of human feeling." The method of the hostile reviewer had been to excerpt a passage from those which, as Hunt said, "most require attention," turn it into prose, and proclaim it nonsense. Hunt's reply was to make humbug of a passage from Cary's translation of Dante by the same conclusive procedure. He then rendered a delightfully accurate and wholly competent paraphrase of the Reviewer's Promethean puzzle, which consisted in the famous passage beginning

> "The painted veil, by those who were, called life —"

the meaning of which lines is quite comprehensible, of course, to any intelligent and sympathetic reader, who would understand them just as Hunt did.

In reply to the charge of a lack of nature and human feeling, the ode **To a Skylark** was quoted in full, with a part of the Spanish ode, which last concerned a cause in which Hunt was passionately interested. The first of these poems was offered as an example of what Shelley could do in the unmetaphysical, and Hunt said of it, with reference to the words of the **Quarterly,**

> — I will venture to say, that there is not in the whole circle of lyric poetry a piece more **full** of "original images of nature, of simple expressions of human feeling, and of the associations of the appearances of the moral with those of the material world." . . . I know of nothing more beautiful than this, — more choice of tones, more natural in words, more abundant in exquisite, cordial, and most poetical associations.†

In this series of letters, chiefly on **Prometheus Unbound,** Hunt did not attempt to prove Shelley an orthodox Christian. But he did show that in spirit and motive, in his poetry as in his life, Shelley was endowed with that other-worldly excess in application of the Law of Love in the Light of Reason which the world since Christ's own time has found it impossible to accept in all of its implications, and which is infinitely more comparable to what Christ truly taught than any establishment of ecclesiastics and churchly dogmas which has existed since His day. Shelley must perhaps remain out of the fold of those whose Christianity is embodied in circumstantial faith and a literal code, but he is as much nearer the truth as the spirit is nearer than the letter of the law to the imponderable verities of the Divine.‡

It has been observed that Shelley's latter writings reflected a less blatantly rebellious and more tranquilly religious spirit than did those of his iconoclastic youth. There are, for example, references in his preface to **Hellas** to "religion" and "Christianity" quite in the manner of one who has accepted them, in a proper sense, as referring to stabilizing and essential elements in the world of men. And the change in Shelley, if there was one, may very likely have consisted in the growing realization that "religion" meant more than priestly hocus-pocus, and "Christianity" more than the abuses of the organized church.

No. 6 of the **Examiner** Letters was a notice of **Adonais.**** Of the full merit of this poem Hunt seemed unaware; he used the elegy chiefly as ammunition against the **Quarterly Review.** He thought it a poem no more "calculated to be popular" than **Prometheus Unbound,** inasmuch as it was "of too abstract and subtle a nature for that purpose," but believed that it would delight the discriminating few. He defended the use by elegiac poets of an apparently artificial poetical convention to convey an authentic emotion; he was able to see that the imaginative world is the poet's reality. But, in the inevitable comparison with Milton's **Lycidas,** he found that

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* **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 66-69.
† Ibid., p. 72.
‡ See, for example, his Notes to **Hellas.**
** **The Examiner,** July 7, 1822, No. 743.

> Mr. Shelley is the more natural in this respect, inasmuch as he is entirely abstract and imaginative, and recalls his lamented acquaintance to mind in no other shape than one strictly poetical. . . . But it is not as a mere acquaintance however poetical, that Mr. Shelley records him. It is as the intimate acquaintance of all lovely and lofty thoughts, as the nursling of the Muse, the hope of her coming days, the creator of additional beauties and Intelligences for the adornment and inhabitation of the material world.*

The beauties of the poems were reviewed, as usual, but Hunt found an equal pleasure in the attack upon the reviewers, and indicted them on the final count of having wilfully avoided presenting to the public such poems as this and **The Cenci,** which, by reason of their combined beauty and clarity, would have set Shelley most justly and attractively before the public eye. And he took leave of his adversaries with Shelley's prose tribute to Severn, turning his back upon the dastardly publicans of the press who had tried their best to darken two of the brightest stars in the firmament of English poetry.

In his letters to Shelley, Hunt was able joyfully to record a growing respect among readers of poetry for some of the works he had helped to present to their attention. In a letter to Mary Shelley he wrote:

> I can tell him that his name gets more known and respected every day, in **spite** of the **Quarterly Reviewers** —†

On April 6, 1820, he wrote of **The Cenci**:

> Shelley's tragedy is out and flourishing. I recently took, as his friend and representative, congratulations on all sides, upon the dedication [which was to Hunt], the preface, and the drama. . . . What a noble book, Shelley, have you given us! What a true, stately, and yet affectionate mixture of poetry, philosophy, and human nature, and horror, and all-redeeming sweetness of intention, for there is an undersong of suggestion through it all, that sings, as it were, after the storm is over, like a brook in April.‡

And in March of 1822, he added to his encouraging news of the progress of Shelley's reputation in England a private tribute, unconcerned with the reviewers, to **Adonais**:

> — these things, depend upon it, are getting better understood every day [the truth about Prometheus, Hunt means], and shall be better and better understood every day to come. One circumstance which helps to reconcile me to having been detained on this coast, is the opportunity it has given me to make your works speak for themselves wherever I could; and you are in high lustre I assure you, with the most intelligent circles in Plymouth, . . . I have, indeed, been astonished to find how well prepared people of intelligence are to fall in with your aspirations, and despise the mistakes and rascally instincts of your calumniators. . . . I delight in **Adonais.** It is the most Delphic poetry I have seen a long while; full of those embodyings of the most subtle and airy imaginations, — those arrestings and explanations of the most shadowy yearnings of our being — which are the most difficult of all things to put into words, and the most delightful when put.**

Finally, Hunt's Preface to **The Mask of Anarchy,** which was published ten years later with the poem, was naturally more a tribute to the man than a consideration of his poetry. He was here presented by his friend as a man interested in the immediate remedy of reforms, as well as a prophet and teacher of the good to come. His encomiast had seen the writings of the poet assist in the "general progress of knowledge," which had ushered in a "wiser period" than that in which he wrote. He was portrayed as one who suffered from no deluded pride of family, but who was a naturally appointed leader of an "aristocracy of intellect and morals."

> For if ever there was a man upon earth, of a more spiritual nature than ordinary, partaking of the errors and perturbations of his species, but seeing and working through them with a seraphical purpose of good, such an one was Percy Bysshe Shelley.††

In the genial and digressive writings of his after-years, when Hunt was no longer quite the militant apostle of liberty, his views subsided into the retrospective tendency to make of Shelley an other-worldly and almost orthodox archangel — the "Eternal Child," the Christian-at-heart. Hunt thus fed the legend that was to grow by the efforts of Medwin and Trelawney, and shared with Medwin especially the desire to represent Shelley as an adherent to the Christian spirit, even to the Christian faith.

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* **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 86.
† August 4, 1818. **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 104.
‡ Ibid., pp. 134-5.
** **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** pp. 156-7.
†† **Shelley-Leigh Hunt,** p. 83.

For his Christianity, in the proper sense of the word, he went to the gospel of St. James, and to the Sermon on the Mount by Christ himself, for whose truly divine spirit he entertained the highest reverence. There was nothing which embittered his enemies against him more than the knowledge of this fact. His want of faith, indeed, in the letter, and his exceeding faith in the spirit of Christianity, formed a comment, the one on the other, very formidable to those who choose to forget what scripture itself observes on that point.*

There was a tendency, also, to glorify Shelley at the expense of Keats:

Their styles in writing also were very different; and Keats, notwithstanding his unbounded sympathies with ordinary flesh and blood, and even the transcendental cosmopolitics of **Hyperion,** was so far inferior in universality to his great acquaintance, that he could not accompany him in his daedal rounds with nature, and his Archimedean endeavors to move the globe with his own hands.†

Of the causes of Shelley's poor reception by the world he strove to serve, his friend wrote:

Temperament and early circumstances conspired to make him a reformer, at a time of life when few begin to think for themselves; and it was his misfortune, as far as immediate reputation was concerned, that he was thrown upon society with a precipitancy and vehemence, which rather startled them with fear for themselves, than allowed them to become sensible of the love and zeal that impelled him. He was like a spirit that had darted out of its orb, and found itself in another world . . . a misunderstood nature, slain by the ungenial elements.‡

This was a correct view of the reception of Shelley, and we have suggested that troublous times in England had something to do with it, as well as the precipitant nature of the prophet.

But the reconciliation of Shelley to received religion concerned Hunt most in those days. While he was perfectly right in identifying Shelley's ethics with those of Christ, and in noting his growing respect for the founder of the Church, he was wrong, and others since him have been wrong, in suggesting that Shelley was on the way to become a Christian. Nothing in the poet's code was derived in any way from churchly authority; the very ethos of group religion was alien and distasteful to him; and his basic opposition to creed and faith was attested by the very remark quoted here by Hunt in the effort to adjust the poet's beliefs to conventional interpretation:

The leading feature of Shelley's character may be said to have been a natural piety. . . . He did himself an injustice with the public, in using the popular name of the Supreme Being inconsiderately. He identified it solely with the most vulgar and tyrannical notions of a God made after the worst human fashion; and did not sufficiently reflect, that it was often used by a juster devotion to express a sense of the great Mover of the universe. An impatience in contradicting worldly and pernicious notions of a supernatural power, led his own aspirations to be misconstrued; for though . . . he justly thought that a Divine Being would prefer the increase of benevolence and good before any praise, or even recognition of himself . . . yet there was in reality no belief to which he clung with more fondness than that of some great pervading "Spirit of Intellectual Beauty"; as may be seen in his aspirations on that subject. He assented warmly to an opinion which I expressed in the cathedral at Pisa, while the organ was playing, that a truly divine religion might yet be established, if charity were really made the principle of it, instead of faith.**

It was the Leigh Hunt of the **Examiner** years who was most significant in the history of Shelley criticism. He was the only contemporary of the poet to present in public review an adequate critical study of Shelley's poetry and philosophy. Not so well qualified, perhaps, as Mary Shelley to comprehend the subtler aspects of the poet's mind, he was most influential as his public advocate. His essays sought not only to analyse the salient qualities of Shelley's writings, but to set them before the public mind in such a way as to make clear their motives, purposes, and social implications. Hunt's aim was the double one of interpretation and conciliation; aside from his friendship for the poet, he was moved by unfaltering confidence in the superlative genius of Shelley and by his consciousness that they both were enlisted in the same high cause of social betterment.

It was written of him in the early days of his campaign in Shelley's behalf,

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* **The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt, with Reminiscences,** New York, Harper's, 1872, Vol. II, p. 31.

† Ibid., Vol. II, p. 36.

‡ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 134. Quoted in the Preface to **The Beauties of P. B. Shelley,** p. xv.

** Ibid., Vol. II, p. 133.

> He considers Shelley as the discoverer of a pure original spring of human knowledge, from whence other men, having perceived its existence, will dig channels in which rivers of knowledge will flow in all directions, less pure than at their source, but more adopted to the senses and comprehension of mankind.*

He sought to make Shelley's gospel accessible to the common mind, to reconcile the public to his teachings as well as to his art, and to defend him against all unjust attack. By his own participation in the liberal cause, he was qualified, as few critics of the time seem to have been, to acclaim the radical thought of the Romantic era as well as its new beauty.

Hunt's methods in this campaign are worthy of careful observation, in connection with the study of critical technique. Some of the articles were pure counter-attack upon the **Quarterly,** exposing the weaknesses of the enemy with a merciless logic. Others involved in their defence of Shelley the analysis of his poetry and meaning, and this analysis was made with sound sense and a fine understanding of poetic qualities and aims, as well as with valid interpretation of Shelley's embodied thoughts. Still others sought directly to interpret his poems, and to render their meanings clear and acceptable to the public mind.

In the articles of this last kind, Hunt's procedure was a patient and logical process of elucidation. One of his methods was simply to reprint a poem, or a representative passage, and thus to give currency to his subject and supply the grounds of argument. The fallacies of fragmentary quotation he usually avoided, sharing the poem with his reader as well as his ideas about the poem. Another of his methods was to rehearse the story of a long poem, in preparation for its discussion in a later number. A third was to forestall the objections which Shelley's innovations might have encountered if abruptly presented, by dealing first with the admitted evils which Shelley sought to cure. Another was to present the poet's aim in the poet's own lucid language taken from his prefaces, applying these prefaces, incidentally, as public documents to the troubles of the times. Another was, of course, to set forth the salient elements of special interest and appeal in the poem in question. And another was to indicate the weaknesses of the poet, the most notable of which was his failure to use the best methods of securing ordinary human interest in his works.

The results of this critical series were the announcement of Shelley as a great poetical artist; his establishment as a sound social philosopher, as a master of language and meter, and as a benevolent and wholesome spirit; his effective defence against misrepresentation in hostile journals; and his vindication against charges of immoral life, pernicious atheism, unchristian practices and spirit ,and perverted taste. He was hailed by Hunt, with a confidence which time and change have justified, as a great genius and a greater philanthropist; the later verdict differs with his only in placing its emphasis upon the first of these rather than upon the second. The principal weaknesses in Leigh Hunt's Shelley criticisms were, thus, his tendency to slight the poet for the reformer, his possession of a style polemical rather than memorable as literature, his occasional excesses in the direction of conciliation, and his failure to appreciate the spiritual qualities of Shelley's poetical evangelism and to participate in his abstract delight.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

Mary Shelley was well qualified to become the most significant of the contemporary commentators upon the writings and genius of her husband. She had become his companion and his wife by reason of no mere accident of romance; there was between them an affinity of ideal and intellect which is betokened by the incision with which she laid bare the heart of Shelley's inner meaning, and by the sensitiveness with which she recorded the subtle influences, within and without, which were at work in the growth and creative consciousness of the poet. She was the daughter of gifted and distinguished parents, and embodied that portion of their genius which in its visions and aims most resembled Shelley's. She was herself a creative writer, if not a poet, and had a more practical insight than her husband into the problems of literary creation and the talents by which authors are qualified to solve them. She knew the practical aspect of literature perhaps even better than Shelley, absorbed in his imaginative purposes, ever did. Her comradeship with the poet was close and continuous throughout his best productive years; she shared in his work and his ideals, knew his purposes and passions, and perceived and recorded — and in this lies her finest contribution to Shelley interpretation — the aims and motives, the social forces, the environmental inspirations and depressions, and the bodily ills that influenced the building of his work.†

Her labors as his representative and posthumous exegete were hindered by the disorderly state of Shelley's papers, the consciousness of a public hostility to his doctrines, the tyrannous restrictions laid upon her by Sir Timothy Shelley, and the

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* Journal of Maria Gisborne, quoted in **A Shelley Library** by Thomas J. Wise, London, 1924.

† See **Mary Shelley** by Richard Church, New York, The Viking Press, 1928. For a brief account of her career and writings see Ingpen's **Letters of P. B. Shelley,** Vol. I.

debilitating sense of incomparable loss which haunted her for many years after Lerici. There was upon her always, as upon all the little company who shared her sorrow, the blinding effulgence of the Eternal Child. This at times led her into loving but futile attempts to harmonize the perverse irreconcilables that marked his poetry. But, on the whole, she succeeded in her brave undertaking of unveiling Shelley's genius to the world in its true aspect, and her work as critical editor was marked by interpretative acumen, cleansing restraint, and irrefragable authenticity as to fact.

She was forbidden by Sir Timothy Shelley to publish any biography of Shelley during the lifetime of her father-in-law. Her income from Shelley's estate was made to depend upon obedience to this harsh and unnecessary injunction. It was also demanded that the **Posthumous Poems,** which had been issued in 1824 with a preface by her hand, be suppressed. The life of Shelley which she planned to write was never accomplished. And thus her commentary has come to us only in the notes and prefaces which accompanied the volumes of Shelley's poetry and prose which she edited as his memorials before the world, and which the relaxation of Sir Timothy's restrictions allowed finally to appear.*

The poetical works were published under her direction in 1839, and the **Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments** in 1840. These writings, including additions of matter previously suppressed, she presented as the achievement by which Shelley's genius should be judged, and to them her notes and commentaries were added.

In her Preface to the **Poems** of 1839, Mrs. Shelley made a statement of her purpose as editor, and briefly indicated Shelley's chief motive as man and artist, his ideas, the influences at work upon his poetry, the classes into which his poems might be divided, his traits as a poet, and his impact upon the social order.

Her purpose was, first, to make a correct and complete presentation of his writings to the public, and, second, to detail "the history of these productions, as they sprang, living and warm, from his heart and brain."† There was also a brief vindication of his character, but the editor considered the time unripe for biography. Though there was no intention to circumvent Sir Timothy's restriction, the following notes did record Shelley's experiences and environments at productive periods, and indicate his emotional, if they did not give a complete account of his external, life.

Of Shelley's consistent role as renovator of society she said

> To defecate life of its misery and its evil, was the ruling passion of his soul; he dedicated to it every power of his mind, every pulsation of his heart. He looked on political freedom as the direct agent to effect the happiness of mankind; and thus any new-sprung hope of liberty inspired a joy and an exultation more intense and wild than he could have felt for any personal advantage.‡

Of the source of these ideas:

> He had been from youth the victim of the state of feeling inspired by the reaction of the French Revolution; and believing firmly in the justice and excellence of his views, it cannot be wondered that a nature as sensitive, as impetuous, and as generous as his, should put its whole force into the attempt to alleviate for others the evils of those systems from which he had himself suffered.**

And these ideas were not merely held by the man, but were given expression by the poet, who thoroughly believed in poetry as a means of social uplift.

> These characteristics breathe throughout his poetry. The struggle for human weal; the resolution firm to martyrdom; the impetuous pursuit; the glad triumph in good; the determination not to despair. Such were the features that marked those of his works which he regarded with most complacency, as sustained by a lofty subject and useful aim.††

Her two-fold classification of Shelley's poems, which was based on the degree of personal feeling put into them by the poet, applied only to those poems, minor ones with respect to the writer's purpose of reform, which were least, or not at all, devoted to the expression of his passion for uplift and liberty. Her preceding references to the major poems of reformatory zeal should be taken as indicating a third and most important genus.

> In addition to these, his poems may be divided into two classes, — the purely imaginative, and those which sprung from the emotions of his heart. Among the former may be classed "The Witch of Atlas," "Adonais," and

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* See Ingpen's **Letters of P. B. Shelley,** Vol. I, pp. xli-xlii.

† Quotations are from the Moxon reprint of 1847 of the **Poems** and the **Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments,** in one volume. P. v.

‡ P. v.

** P. vi.

†† P. vi.

his latest composition, left imperfect, "The Triumph of Life." In the first of these particularly, he gave the reins to his fancy, and luxuriated in every idea as it rose; in all, there is that sense of mystery which formed an essential portion of his perception of life — a clinging to the subtler inner spirit, rather than to the outward form — a curious and metaphysical anatomy of human passion and perception.*

In connection with the second class, Mrs. Shelley made mention—and this characteristic is actually in the poems, and not merely derived from her knowledge of her husband—of Shelley's constant abstraction of love in his poetic treatment of it.†

> The second class is, of course, the more popular, as appealing at once to the emotions common to us all; some of these rest on the passion of love; others on grief and despondency; others on the sentiments inspired by natural objects. Shelley's conception of love was exalted, absorbing, allied to all that is purest and noblest in our nature, and warmed by earnest passion; such it appears when he gave it a voice in verse. Yet he was usually averse to expressing these feelings, except when highly idealized. . . .‡

Later critics seem to have taken this merely as a phase of Shelley's universal tendency toward abstraction in poetry, but Mrs. Shelley's comment makes of it a trait worthy of separate investigation.

Of his qualities as a poet—that is, as a poetic mind, and not merely as a writer of verses—she recorded certain traits which, while we find them in his verse, become doubly significant because she found them also in the man and in his habits of thought. The most interesting of her comments, perhaps, is that one which forces us to interpret Shelley's poetry, at least in part, or at certain times, as the "literature of escape." The importance of this statement will become more apparent when we shall attempt to define the nature of Shelley's relationship to external reality, his grasp upon the world of social fact.

> No poet was ever warmed by a more genuine and unforced inspiration. His extreme sensibility gave the intensity of passion to his intellectual pursuits; and rendered his mind keenly alive to every perception of outward objects, as well as to his internal sensations . . . to escape from such ["the sad vicissitudes of human life"], he delivered up his soul to poetry, and felt happy when he sheltered himself from the influence of human sympathies, in the wildest regions of fancy. His imagination has been termed too brilliant, his thoughts too subtle. He loved to idealise reality; and this is a taste shared by few. . . . In this Shelley resembled Plato, both taking more delight in the abstract and ideal, than in the special and tangible. . .**

Finally, the Preface contained a statement, made possible by improved public conditions in England, that Shelley's endeavors toward social good were beginning to bear fruit. Perhaps this improvement must be taken as one which Shelley would have welcomed had he lived to see it, rather than one which should be attributed specifically to his efforts. On the other hand, it is impossible to deny that he was the voice of a new era; and at least one modern critic has defended Shelley's radical views by essaying to demonstrate the fact of their gradual adoption by society.††

Mrs. Shelley gave Shelley a part of the credit for the social renovation:

> He died, and the world showed no outward sign; but his influence over mankind, though slow in growth, is fast augmenting, and in the ameliorations that have taken place in the political state of his country, we may trace in part the operation of his arduous struggles.‡‡

Mrs. Shelley's further criticism is found in brief commentary essays attached to each group of the minor poems, as arranged in her edition. Her method involved a record of the circumstances under which each division of Shelley's work was composed, an exposition of the purposes of certain poems, a statement of the condition of Shelley's mind at the times of writing, and the evaluation of individual works or peculiar talents.

In the Note on **Queen Mab,** aside from the history of the poem, the principal subject was Shelley's idea of human perfectibility. Mrs. Shelley preferred to subordinate the more violent opinions expressed in that poem to the consideration of the more permanent elements of Shelley's doctrine which **Queen Mab** also contained. She justified his motives in writing the poem, without attempting to defend his specific attacks on "Kings, Priests, and Statesmen."

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* P. vi.

† Cf. Carpenter and Barnefield's **The Psychology of the Poet Shelley,** London, 1925, and the Freudian analysis therein.

‡ **Works,** Moxon, p. vi.

** Ibid., p. vii.

†† Henry S. Salt's **Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poet and Pioneer,** London and New York, Scribner's, 1896.

‡‡ **Works,** Moxon, p. viii.

> To aversion to the society of his fellow-creatures, such as he found them when collected together in societies, where one egged on the other to acts of tyranny, was joined the deepest sympathy and compassion; while the attachment he felt for individuals and the admiration with which he regarded their powers and their virtues, led him to entertain a high opinion of the perfectibility of human nature, and he believed that all could reach the highest grade of moral improvement, did not the customs and prejudices of society foster evil passions, and excuse evil actions. . . . At the same time, it was the cardinal article of his faith, that if men were but taught and induced to treat their fellows with love, charity, and equal rights, this earth would realize Paradise. He looked upon religion as it is professed, and, above all, practised, as hostile, instead of friendly, to the cultivation of those virtues, which would make men brothers.*

This desire for heaven on earth, was, in Shelley's youth, an impatient one — not the anticipation of a gradual process of betterment; and a sense of impending death, together with a not unworthy ambition to give a good account of his few years, moved him to attempt human emancipation by a single and uncompromising stroke.†

Of Shelley's reading at this period, Mrs. Shelley made mention of the "French philosophers," and of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, calling attention to the obvious influence of **Thalaba** upon the opening passages of **Queen Mab.**

Alastor, according to Mrs. Shelley, marked a distinct alteration in Shelley's mood and mind. He was less optimistic than before, more inclined to inward musing and less to jubilant prophecy, but no less determined in the pursuit of the ultimate goal. The poem was naturally a very different thing from **Queen Mab.**

> In the latter, Shelley poured out all the cherished speculations of his youth — all the irrepressible emotions, censure, and hope, to which the present suffering, and what he considers the proper destiny of his fellow-creatures, gave birth. "Alastor," on the contrary, contains an individual interest only. A very few years, with their attendant events, had checked the ardour of Shelley's hopes, though he still thought them well grounded, and that to advance their fulfillment was the noblest task man could achieve.‡

The "literature of escape" was being sought thus early, though with no less of sympathy for the race from whose sorrows, in their impact upon him, the poet was made to shrink. The period had been one of hardship and misfortune for him.

> Physical suffering had also considerable influence in causing him to turn his eyes inward; inclining him rather to brood over the thoughts and emotions of his own soul, than to glance abroad, and to make, as in "Queen Mab," the whole universe the object and subject of his song.**

But Mrs. Shelley found this poem, as did certain later critics, most characteristic of its author.

> None of Shelley's poems is more characteristic than this. The solemn spirit that reigns throughout, the worship of the majesty of nature, the broodings of a poet's heart in solitude — the mingling of the exulting joy which the various aspect of the visible universe inspires, with the sad and struggling pangs which human passion imparts, give a touching interest to the whole. . . . The poem ought rather to be considered didactic than narrative; it was the outpouring of his own emotions, embodied in the purest form he could conceive, painted in the ideal hues which his brilliant imagination inspired, and softened by the recent anticipation of death.††

The didactic interpretation agreed with Shelley's own Preface, in which he had represented the poem as "not barren of instruction to actual men," indicating as it did the fate of those "who attempt to exist without human sympathy."‡‡

The Note on **The Revolt of Islam** had to do with certain qualities of Shelley's mind, with the external stimuli that influenced the work, and with the severe criticism that the poem received, in answer to which a letter of Shelley (to Godwin) was quoted. Shelley had represented the poem as the product of " 'the agony and bloody sweat' of intellectual travail," and as "in many respects a genuine picture of my own mind." The most significant thing in Mrs. Shelley's commentary is her emphasis upon the ideal rather than upon the reformatory implications of the poem.

> The saddest events awaited his return to England; but such was his fear to wound the feelings of others, that he never expressed the anguish he felt,

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* Ibid., pp. 32-33.
† See pp. 33-34.
‡ Ibid., pp. 47.
** P. 47.
†† P. 47.
‡‡ For more modern confirmation of this view, and of Mrs. Shelley's estimate of Shelley's development in this period, see Dowden's **Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** I, pp. 531-533.

> and seldom gave vent to the indignation roused by the persecutions he underwent; while the course of deep unexpressed passion, and the sense of injury, engendered the desire to embody themselves in forms defecated of all the weakness and evil which cling to real life.*

Thus, presumably to reconcile the public to a genius who had suffered much abuse for this very work, she was silent as to Shelley's provocative purpose, expressed in his Preface, to promulgate the poem as "an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live."†

In her somewhat more lengthy discussion of **Prometheus Unbound,** Mrs. Shelley described the Italian setting in which the poem was created, explained the subject, the modification of the old legend to suit Shelley's purpose, and the presence of the old idea of perfectibility; commented upon the chief allegorical figures, compared the drama with **The Revolt of Islam,** and characterized it as the poetry of escape plus the purpose of inspirational uplift. The subject was the conflict, a favorite conception of Shelley's, of the Good and Evil principles — the same conflict as that used at the opening of **The Revolt of Islam.** The inspiring force was his belief that "evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled." The drama was different from **The Revolt** partly because a "more idealized image" of the vindicator of the race had been used.

> Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none. . . . That man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system. And the subject he loved best to dwell on, was the image of One warring with the Evil Principle, oppressed not only by it, but by all, even the good, who were deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity. A victim full of fortitude and hope, and the spirit of triumph emanating from a reliance in the ultimate omnipotence of good. . . . He followed certain classical authorities in figuring Saturn as the good principle, Jupiter the usurping evil one, and Prometheus as the regenerator, who, unable to bring mankind back to primitive innocence, used knowledge as a weapon to defeat evil, by leading mankind beyond the state wherein they are sinless through ignorance, to that in which they are virtuous through wisdom.‡

In specifying the abstractions represented by Jupiter, Saturn (or Demogorgon), Prometheus, Asia, and Hercules, Mrs. Shelley sufficiently confirmed the interpretation of the drama as an allegory. This interpretation, in its more literal aspect, has been attacked in very recent days.** But Shelley's known purpose, and the state of his mind as shown by at least one relevant entry in his manuscript book,†† are evidence of an allegorical purpose; and the fact that every figure in the drama may not be conclusively identified with a moral entity is no more reason for denying the essentially allegorical quality of the work than the same argument would be in connection with the **Faerie Queene.**

But the subtle mysticism of the poem was, and still is, likely to provoke accusations of meaninglessness and obscurity, or at least to incur an art-for-art's-sake interpretation; and this Mrs. Shelley saw.

> Shelley, develops, more particularly in the lyrics of this drama, his abstruse and imaginative theories with regard to the Creation. It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem. They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction, but they are far from vague.‡‡

It is true, however, that, in her statement of Shelley's method, Mrs. Shelley indicated a process the exact reverse of the usual technique of allegory. That method consisted in the use of idealization rather than of physical and familiar imagery; whereas much allegory consists in the clothing of the ideal in a concrete symbolism drawn from earthly and objective nature.

> More popular poets clothe the ideal with familiar and sensible imagery. Shelley loved to idealize the real — to gift the mechanism of the material universe with a soul and a voice, and to bestow such also on the most delicate and abstract emotions and thoughts of the mind. Sophocles was his great master in this species of imagery.***

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* P. 96.
† Ibid., Shelley's Preface, p. 48.
‡ P. 126.
** See an article by N. I. White, in **PMLA,** 1925, Vol. XI, p. 172.
†† **Works,** Moxon, p. 127.
‡‡ P. 127.
*** P. 127.

But she was right in suggesting, as this passage does suggest, that Shelley's method, was simply the practice of that peculiar sort of imagery in which he delighted, in which symbols are drawn from the universe of thought and vision rather than merely from the physical world of sensory experience. The fact of symbolism and the significance of parable remained; the ideal, as well perhaps as the real, was concentrated and designated in specific, if nebulous, imagery; and the instructive meaning to the mind was consistently present, even if involved at times in a world of fantastic and unsymbolic ornamentation. The allegorical method might be questioned, but not the moral meaning.

Here again, Mrs. Shelley believed that Shelley had taken refuge in the realm of thought, and had not dared hope for general public comprehension of his aim:

> An exile, and strongly impressed with the feeling that the majority of his countrymen regarded him with sentiments of aversion, such as his own heart could experience towards none, he sheltered himself from such disgusting and painful thoughts in the calm retreats of poetry, and built up a world of his own, with the more pleasure, since he hoped to induce some one or two to believe that the earth might become such, did mankind themselves consent.*

In **The Cenci** Shelley had revealed to his wife a new and unexpected aspect of his genius. She had urged him to undertake drama of a sort more realistic than his characteristic, idealized productions; but had thought that his predilection for the abstract might preclude success in such a work. She had been eager, however, to see some work of his acclaimed by a comprehending public, for the good effect such success might have upon the poet. And when indeed **The Cenci** was created, she was prompt to claim for him a notable success and a new and mighty talent.

> Shelley most erroneously conceived himself to be destitute of this talent. . . . He asserted that he was too metaphysical and abstract — too fond of the theoretical and the ideal, to succeed as a tragedian. . . . I speedily saw the great mistake we had made, and triumphed in the discovery of the new talent brought to light from that mine of wealth, never, alas! through his untimely death, worked to its depths — his richly-gifted mind.†

Mrs. Shelley observed in the play not only the absence of literary influences but also the omission of what Shelley had called

> "the peculiar feelings and opinions which characterise my other compositions; I having attended simply to the impartial development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were, together with the greatest degree of popular effect to be produced by such a development."‡

The play was thus, as she understood, an experiment in realism and in public appeal; and we have seen that it was quite promptly accepted as great drama, although it shocked many by its theme, and was therefore not acceptable to Covent Garden.

In her own estimate of the play, Mrs. Shelley justly called attention to Shelley's delicate treatment of the ghastly element in its subject. The subordination of the most horrible matter had been consciously and successfully undertaken, and it is hard to discover the details which at least one later critic thought should have been suppressed.** The modern reader must agree with Mrs. Shelley, but objections to the stage effect of the drama will doubtless remain.

With this observation Mrs. Shelley combined her general judgment of the play, in what is the most interesting and purely critical paragraph of the Note:

> Universal approbation soon stamped The Cenci as the best tragedy of modern times. . . . There is nothing that is not purely dramatic throughout; and the character of Beatrice, proceeding from vehement struggle to horror, to deadly resolution, and lastly, to the elevated dignity of calm suffering joined to passionate tenderness and pathos, is touched with hues so vivid and so beautiful, that the poet seems to have read intimately the secrets of the noble heart imaged in the lovely countenance of the unfortunate girl.†† The Fifth Act is a masterpiece. It is the finest thing he ever wrote, and may claim proud comparison not only with any contemporary, but preceding poet. The varying feelings of Beatrice are expressed with passionate, heartreaching eloquence. Every character has a voice that echoes truth in its tones. It is curious, to one acquainted with the written story, to mark the success with which the poet has inwoven the real incidents of the tragedy into his scenes, and yet, through the power of poetry, has obliterated all that would otherwise have shown too harsh or too hideous

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* P. 128.
† P. 158.
‡ From the well-known letter to Peacock, asking that he try to have the play presented at Covent Garden. The letter was quoted by Mrs. Shelley, p. 159.
** Cf. C. S. Middleton's discussion, treated below in this study.
†† Shelley, while in Italy, had been much interested in her portrait.

in the picture. His success was a double triumph; and often after he was earnestly entreated to write again in a style that commanded popular favour, while it was not less instinct with truth and genius. But the bent of his mind went the other way; and even when employed on subjects whose interest depended on character and incident, he would start off in another direction, and leave the delineations of human passion, which he could depict in so able a manner, for fantastic creations of his fancy, or the expression of those opinions and sentiments with regard to human nature and its destiny; a desire to diffuse which, was the master passion of his soul.*

Except for her challenge to the great dramatists of the past, Mrs. Shelley's opinion would be considered just by modern critics of the play; and her statement of its relationship to Shelley's other works and to the bent of his genius must stand as true. **The Cenci** was a realistic and "popular" interlude in his process of almost constant idealization. It signified dramatic genius without the passion for dramatic creation. It stood apart, both from the poems of purely personal fantasy and from the works, more characteristic perhaps than even **Alastor,** which envisioned the millennium and sought to approach it by spiritual appeal to a leavening minority of seeing minds.

Hellas Mrs. Shelley represented as a hymn of prophetic triumph, which had arisen out of Shelley's passion for liberty and his conviction that the Greeks were about to be freed. Upon the occasion of any popular uprising against tyranny, Shelley had found it most natural to generalize in verse upon the theme of the universal quality called freedom. The poem was the work of a "moment of enthusiasm."

> Shelley had hymned the dawn of liberty in Spain and Naples; — he felt himself naturally impelled to decorate with poetry the uprise of that people, whose works he regarded with deep admiration; and to adopt the vaticinatory character in prophesying their success. . . . His prophecies, indeed, came true in their general, not their particular purport. . . . Almost against reason, as it appeared to him, he resolved to believe that Greece would prove triumphant; and in this spirit, auguring ultimate good, yet grieving over the vicissitudes to be endured in the interval, he composed his drama.†

Especially in the qualities and circumstances which Mrs. Shelley mentioned, **Hellas** was a poem peculiarly characteristic of Shelley in his later years. Elicited by the enthusiasm produced by a specific event, it was nevertheless generalized, universalized in its scope and prophecy. Touched by concrete experience, the poet had projected the promise of the physical present into the abstract and Utopian future. The lyric beauty of the choruses was Shelley at his best; the passionate urge of his ideal in conflict with the scepticism of practical reason marked the limit of his latter disillusionment. And this is significant for the modern understanding of the relationship of Shelley to his real world. Few men of his years have experienced, in modern times and in civilized countries, so many personal misfortunes of social implication, or so many consequences of the maladministration of institutions in themselves capable of great social good. His life, viewed narrowly, consisted in rebellion against the institutions themselves; his real conflict was with the abuses of these social agencies; and before we condemn him for his failure to make this distinction, we must consider how great and real those abuses were in his day. In any case, it is absurd to say that Shelley did not "know" or "comprehend" the realities of life. His issues with society were specific; the aims, if not the methods, of his rebellions and reforms, were clearly defined; and the knowledge of the concrete, practical world upon which his nonconformity was based was the result of the impact of that world upon a singularly sensitive but studious and intelligent being.

Not ignorance, but nonconformity, had shaped his responses to the external system of men and things; and for this he paid a penalty heavier, perhaps, than the individual pays whose maladjustment is through ignorance. But, with his more mature development, he transferred much of his rebellion to the world of ideality, where he might build in peace a Utopia to his dream, basing its hope of achievement upon the faith of his soul, with which the evidence of mind and reason waged unremitting war.

Mrs. Shelley arranged the minor poems according to the years of composition, and based her commentary on these yearly groups. The **Oedipus Tyrannus** she presented as "a mere plaything of the imagination," but worthy of inclusion because "like everything he wrote, it breathes that deep sympathy for the sorrows of humanity, and indignation against its oppressors, which make it worthy of his name." The minor poems of 1817 — also the year of **The Revolt of Islam** — marked a period of more thought than action:

> — he had lost the eager spirit which believed it could achieve what it projected for the benefit of mankind.‡

The year was a period of struggle with despondency and pain. The Note for 1818 was given principally to the description of Shelley's life in Italy, with a brief discussion of **Rosalind and Helen. Julian and Maddalo** was scarcely mentioned, perhaps

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* **Works,** Moxon, p. 160.
† P. 180.
‡ P. 205.

because of Mrs. Shelley's attitude toward Byron. Of **Rosalind and Helen** she wrote:

> Shelley had no care for any of his poems that did not emanate from the depths of his mind, and develop some high or abstruse truth. When he does touch on human life and the human heart, no pictures can be more faithful, more delicate, more subtle, or more pathetic. He never mentioned Love, but he shed a grace, borrowed from his own nature, that scarcely any other poet has bestowed, on that passion. When he spoke of it as the law of life, which inasmuch as we rebel against, we err and injure ourselves and others, he promulgated that which he considered an irrefragable truth. In his eyes it was the essence of our being, and all woe and pain arose from the war made against it by selfishness, or insensibility, or mistake. By reverting in his mind to this first principle, he discovered the source of many emotions, and could disclose the secret of all hearts, and his delineations of passion and emotions touch the finest chords of our nature.*

Thus **Rosalind and Helen** was like **The Cenci,** an experiment in a kind of realism. It was a concrete treatment of human material, done in a manner more like that of Coleridge, to whom the poem is indebted, than the usual abstract technique of Shelley. Like **The Cenci,** it proved objectionable to contemporary readers, who accused Shelley of introducing into his work too freely the theme of union between brother and sister. But the significant point to be made from Mrs. Shelley's Note is that **Rosalind and Helen** was not greatly esteemed by its author because it was not a direct and purposeful utterance of any of his social ideals. Shelley was never at heart a pure Romanticist, if Romanticism be defined so as to rule out all didactic quality.†

1819 was a year marked chiefly by certain objective and exoteric republican poems, notably **Peter Bell the Third** and **The Mask of Anarchy.** Shelley's attitude in that year, as Mrs. Shelley recorded it, had been one of sympathy for an oppressed people, tempered by the fading of his early zeal for uprising and resistance. The two principal poems were "popular," as distinguished from the mass of Shelley's work, but to be taken as expressions of serious purpose. Mrs. Shelley thought **The Mask of Anarchy** an effective appeal for liberty. She wrote:

> But the most touching passage is that which describes the blessed effects of liberty; they might make a patriot of any man, whose heart was not wholly closed against his humbler fellow-creatures.‡

This may at least be doubted. But her appeal for the impudent parody of **Peter Bell,** and her assignment to it of an ideal and serious message, must provoke a smile. After disclaiming any personal attack upon Wordsworth, she wrote:

> This poem is, like all others written by Shelley, ideal. He conceived the idealism of a poet — a man of lofty and creative genius, — quitting the glorious calling of discovering and announcing the beautiful and good, to support and propagate ignorant prejudices and pernicious errors. . . . His idea was that a man gifted even as transcendantly as the Author of Peter Bell, with the highest qualities of genius, must, if he fostered such errors, be infected with dulness. This poem was written, as a warning — not as a narration of the reality. He was unacquainted with Wordsworth . . . and therefore, I repeat, his poem is purely ideal; — it contains something of criticism on the compositions of these great poets [Coleridge was also referred to in the poem], but nothing injurious to the men themselves.**

The poem, then, was an expression of Shelley's conception of some of "the errors into which many of the wisest have fallen," but we are justified, on the very reading of the verses, in considering Mrs. Shelley's view an exaggeration of emphasis upon the ideal element in Shelley's work. The **purposeful** element, however, we may admit, even here; the method we must consider far from the "ideal."

The Pisan year of 1820 had produced **The Sensitive Plant, The Cloud, To a Skylark,** the **Ode to Naples,** the **Letter to Maria Gisborne,** and **The Witch of Atlas;** but it was to this last poem that Mrs. Shelley devoted her attention in the Note for that year. In her classification it fell among those poems which were the work of pure

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* P. 229.

† Cf. A. C. Bradley's **Oxford Lectures on Poetry,** London, 1909, p. 169. According to Mr. Bradley, Shelley, in his well-known condemnation of didactic poetry, was speaking against only a narrow and merely rational instruction, and not against high moral purposefulness. In this latter and higher sense, Shelley was consistently and passionately a didactic poet. Mr. Bradley writes: "It appears, therefore, that what he is really attacking is the attempt to give, in the strict sense, more **instruction,** to communicate doctrines, to offer argumentative statements of opinion on right and wrong, and more especially, I think, on controversial questions of the day. . . . He says to the poet: By all means aim at bettering men; you are a man, and are bound to do so; but you are also a poet, and therefore your proper way of doing so is not by reasoning and preaching. . . ."

‡ **Works,** Moxon, p. 251.

** P. 253.

phantasy, the uninhibited and unpurposeful revelling of a prolific imagination among its own dream-like creations. This had been for Shelley an avenue of escape from the oppression of worldly cares; it was the sort of thing from which Mrs. Shelley had sought to turn the poet's attention, in the hope that he might produce some popular, objective poem. But she was forced to admit failure, and to observe again how Shelley had avoided the unideal treatment of earthly good and evil.

> The surpassing excellence of The Cenci had made me greatly desire that Shelley should increase his popularity, by adopting subjects that would more suit the popular taste, than a poem conceived in the abstract and dreamy spirit of the Witch of Atlas. . . . I believed that he would obtain a greater mastery over his own powers, and greater happiness in his mind, if public applause crowned his endeavours. . . . Shelley did not expect sympathy and approbation from the public; but the want of it took away a portion of the ardour that ought to have sustained him while writing. . . . I felt sure, that if his poems were more addressed to the common feelings of men, his proper rank among the writers of the day would be acknowledged; and that popularity as a poet would enable his countrymen to do justice to his character and virtues. . . . But my persuasions were vain, the mind could not be bent from its natural inclination. Shelley shrunk instinctively from portraying human passion, with its mixture of good and evil, of disappointment and disquiet. Such opened again the wounds of his own heart, and he loved to shelter himself rather in the airiest flights of fancy, forgetting love and hate, regret and lost hope, in such imaginations as borrowed their hues from sunrise or sunset, from the yellow moonshine or paly twilight, from the aspect of the far ocean or the shadows of the woods; which celebrated the singing of the winds among the pines, the flow of a murmuring stream, and the thousand harmonious sounds which nature creates in her solitudes. These are the materials which form the Witch of Atlas; it is a brilliant congregation of ideas, such as his senses gathered, and his fancy coloured, during his rambles in the sunny land he so much loved.*

Her Notes for the last two years were merely expressions of reminiscent and dignified sorrow; there was no criticism in them, beyond the inevitable application of **Adonais** to Shelley himself. The Preface to the volume of **Posthumous Poems,** published in 1824, had been likewise a tribute to Shelley's character and a confession of work inadequately done. There she had characterized Shelley's profound knowledge and understanding of external nature, and proclaimed the causes of his persecution.

> The comparative solitude in which Shelley lived, was the occasion that he was personally known to few; and his fearless enthusiasm in the cause which he considered the most sacred upon earth, the improvement of the moral and physical state of mankind, was the chief reason why he, like other illustrious reformers, was pursued by hatred and calumny.†

When, in 1840, her edition of the prose works made its public appearance,‡ another of her prefaces dealt with the personal interest of those documents, the beauty of his descriptive letters and of his translation of Plato's **Symposium,** the approach of public reform toward conformity with his once execrated ideas, his belief in a future life, and the attitudes of his critics. The very substance of Browning's later remarks, those at the beginning of his essay on Shelley, introduced this last of the Prefaces: the significance of intimate biography for the understanding of the subjective poet. But Mrs. Shelley was interested in procuring love for Shelley as well as understanding of his poems, and in conveying proof of his sincerity and purity of mind.

> Let the lovers of Shelley's poetry — of his aspirations for a brotherhood of love, his tender bewailings springing from a too sensitive spirit — his sympathy with woe, his adoration of beauty, as expressed in his poetry; turn to these pages to gather proof of sincerity, and to become acquainted with the form that such gentle sympathies and lofty aspirations work in private life.**

Of the translation of the **Symposium,** which Leigh Hunt had characterized as worthy of the original, she wrote:

> Shelley commands language splendid and melodious as Plato, and renders faithfully the elegance and the gaiety which make the Symposium as amusing as it is sublime.††

Of Shelley's beliefs in regard to immortality, she drew from his letters and from **The Sensitive Plant** evidence that he believed in some future existence, perhaps as a

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* Pp. 278-9.
† P. 327.
‡ **Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments,** two volumes, 1840.
** **Essays,** p. iii.
†† P. iv.

part of the great Spirit of the Whole; but she confessed that his ideas on the subject were vague. At least, they "regarded the country beyond the grave as one by no means foreign to our interests and hopes."* And to this she added her own conviction that no soul as beautiful as Shelley's would ever "be shattered and dispersed by the Creator; but that the qualities and consciousness that formed him, are not only indestructible in themselves, but in the form under which they were united here, and that to become worthy of him is to assure the bliss of a reunion."†

She also felt that his letters would reveal Shelley's practical views in a light favorable to his reputation as a social philosopher. It should be remembered in this connection that she was addressing a period which had attacked Shelley not as a starry visionary having no relationships with the solid earth (so modern readers sometimes think of him) but as a purveyor of destructive doctrines and a pernicious social influence. In defense of him she wrote:

> His practical opinions may be found here. His indignant detestation of political oppression did not prevent him from deprecating the smallest approach to similar crimes on the part of his own party; and he abjured revenge and retaliation, while he strenuously advocated reform. He felt assured that there would be a change for the better in our institutions; he feared bloodshed, he feared the ruin of many. . . . "The thing to fear," he observes, "will be, that the change should proceed too fast — it must be gradual to be secure."‡

And of this prophecy she wrote, in connection with Shelley's **Essay on the Punishment of Death**:

> In the milder season that since Shelley's time has dawned upon England, our legislators each day approximate nearer to his views of justice; this piece, fragment as it is, may suggest to some among them motives for carrying his beneficent views into practice.**

Thus did Mrs. Shelley perform her charge of setting Shelley right before the world. It was a world which had not understood him, even as well as poets ought to be understood in their own times. It had added injury to lack of comprehension (we have seen some of the causes of both); but it had judged him according to its own best light. The age was incapable of receiving a Shelley into its midst with understanding and acclaim. The political cast of its journals rendered him alien to all parties, as well as did his own unpartisan position. Its orthodox religion shut him from the fold and garbed him in the livery of evil. Its critical standards and definitions could not take him in. But Mrs. Shelley was, perhaps, most concerned that his purity of motive should come to light. She presented him as a genius, but without special defense of his poetic technique; she presented him as a valid prophet of social amelioration, but without special pleading for his specific theories; it was as a great and good man yearning and laboring with zeal and intelligence toward the unselfish goal of human betterment that she strove to reveal him to England. And in this struggle she saw herself as the sole advocate and champion; for she recorded of his critics of this time:

> Some among these writers praise the poetry with enthusiasm, and even discrimination; but none understand the man. . . . If it be alleged in praise of Goethe that he was an **artist** as well as a poet; that his principles of composition, his theories of wisdom and virtue, and the ends of existence, rested on a noble and secure basis; not less does that praise belong to Shelley.††

In the body of critical writing contained in her prefaces and notes, then, Mary Shelley supplied the reading world with important guides to the understanding and judgment of her husband and his work which could have come from no other critic, no matter how great the sum of his public information of the poet, how sympathetic his attitude, or how great his critical acumen. Her method consisted in the revelation of the spiritual and environmental influences at work upon the poet, in the historical recording of settings, sources, and inspirations, and in the exposition of philosophies and aims. She labored first for the appreciation of the man, his motives and genius; and second for the aesthetic justification of his works. Hers was interpretation through history. Her natural prejudice in Shelley's favor led her at times to overvalue his less worthy works and describe all of his poems as of the same idealistic cast; her consciousness of a still hostile public caused her to avoid the specific discussion of those of his doctrines which chiefly had given offense. But, in addition to many valid judgments possible only through intimate association with the poet, she provided matter of moment for all the critics who were to succeed her. If Leigh Hunt was Shelley's most powerful champion in the public lists of journalism, Mary Shelley was his most intimate and authentic chronicler.

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* P. v.
† P. vi.
‡ P. ix. Cf. the early letters to Godwin in defense of his Irish endeavors.
** P. v.
†† P. ix.

Though primarily interested in Shelley's personal history, through having, as he boasted, been "the first to turn the tide of obloquy"* from Shelley's weaknesses and direct the public attention to his more lovely traits, Medwin thought himself possessed of "data absolutely requisite for tracing Shelley's genius from its first germs up to its maturity,"† and proceeded to relate the poetry to the facts of the poet's life in such a way as to throw a dubious illumination upon both.

Remarking upon Shelley's liking for Charlotte Dacre's Gothic romance, **Zofloya,** and for Monk Lewis, Medwin introduced at once passages from **Alastor** and the **Hymn to Intellectual Beauty** as proof of the poet's fondness for ghosts and ghostly scenes. Similarly, he linked Shelley's experiences with the fagging system with certain well-known lines in **Laon and Cythna,** and traced the figure of the Wandering Jew from the early fragment in which he and Shelley had collaborated, through the **Queen Mab** notes, **Alastor,** and **Hellas.**‡ But in all this there was no real criticism. Medwin was content merely to mention or quote the passages in which these and other ideas occurred, to remark that the ideas in question **were** there, and thus to adorn the biography with passages of Shelley's poetry, intended to illustrate the poet's life. There was no examination into the ways of genius, no canny or imaginative comment, and little tracing of Shelley's development, beyond the mere recording of his favorite ideas and the quotation of the passages which might best substantiate the biographer's interpretation of fact. Medwin's commentary has this value, however, that, if taken very cautiously, it may serve to call to mind biographical circumstances, especially in Shelley's early life, which help to explain how and why he wrote of certain things; just as Mrs. Shelley's later notes serve, though more skillfully and subtly, a similar purpose in their introduction of the poetry through the exposition of Shelley's more intimate and spiritual attitudes and experiences.

Among these early circumstances Medwin mentioned the influence upon Shelley of "the pseudo Rowley," Chatterton. This influence has since received more detailed confirmation.**

The fallacy which robbed Medwin's commentary of much of its possible value was his stupid or unscrupulous practice of modifying or misinterpreting the poetry in order to substantiate his own mistaken views of certain facts in the poet's life. More generally, the false principle consisted in the procedure of proving fact by poem rather than illuminating poem by fact. For example, Medwin had the fixed idea that Harriet Grove persisted as an ideal in the dream-life of Shelley. To "prove" it, he quoted from **Fiordispina,** written "many years after," and found it "easy to recognize himself [Shelley] and Miss Harriet Grove under the Italian names of Cosimo and Fiordispina." But **Fiordispina** was written in 1820, apparently during the first days of Shelley's acquaintance with Emilia Viviani, and Mr. George E. Woodberry regarded it as one of several "preliminary, though unconscious studies" for **Epipsychidion,** the "crowning work" upon the theme in question.†† That Shelley's love for Harriet Grove "had taken deep root" was proved, said Medwin, by the **Queen Mab** dedication, and he quoted at length. But this dedication, in Shelley's printing of 1813, was titled only "To Harriet - - - -," and the facts would seem to discourage Medwin's interpretation.‡‡ The evidence adduced in his repetition that Miss Grove wrote certain chapters of **Zastrozzi** is of small force in the matter.

To "shew the disposition and bent of his [Shelley's] mind in 1808 and 1809, which ran on bandits, castles, ruined towers, wild mountains, storms and apparitions — the Terrific," Medwin quoted at length several songs from **St. Irvyne** which were, indeed, made largely of such stuff.

In recording Hogg's statement of the popularity of the Margaret Nicholson verses, Medwin compared them with **Queen Mab.**

> One can hardly conceive, in comparing this with **Queen Mab,** which Shelley says was written at 18, in 1809, that they were by the same hand. Though begun, it was not completed until 1812, nor the notes appended to it till the end of 1811, or the beginning of the succeeding year. It has been said, though I do not affirm it, that for these he was much indebted to Godwin, of whom he says, that he has been in moral philosophy what Wordsworth is in poetry; and certainly the correctness, I might say the elegance of the style which they display, and the mass of information they contain on subjects with which, in 1809, he could not have been conversant, seems to show that he must have had some powerful assistance in the task. **Queen Mab** is undoubtedly a more extraordinary effort of genius than any on record, —

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* **The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** by Thomas Medwin. Published by Medwin in 1847 and later added to. New edition by H. Buxton Forman, Oxford University Press, 1913, p. 4.

† Ibid., p. 2.

‡ Ibid., p. 43 and the preceding pages.

** For parallel passages in the two poets, see the Appendix of W. E. Peck's **Shelley: His Life and Work.**

†† See the Cambridge edition of **Shelley's Complete Poems,** p. 443; Medwin's **Life,** p. 48; and Forman's note.

‡‡ See Medwin, p. 48.

and when I say this, I do not forget the early productions of Pope, of Chatterton, or Kirke White.*

On the subject of Moore's remark, recorded in his **Life of Byron,** that skepticism and infidelity "rarely find an entrance into youthful minds," Medwin, in denying the axiom, had this to say of Shelley:

> If he means that, absorbed in dissipation, and carried away by their passion, most young men seldom reflect on subjects most worthy of reflection, I agree with him; but neither Byron nor Shelley were [sic] of this kind. They did not . . . take for granted what had been inculcated; they were not contented with impressions, they wished to satisfy themselves that their impressions were right, and both fell into skepticism, one from presumption and an overweening, foolish ambition of making himself out worse than he was; and Shelley from what he really thought 'a matter of pure speculation'; the result, however erroneous, to repeat Moore's words, 'of thought and reasoning.'†

Medwin's facile enthusiasm was equal even to praising poems of the subject matter of which he knew little or nothing. After quoting from the **Letter to Maria Gisborne** the passage descriptive of Shelley's makeshift study in Reveley's laboratory, with its clutter of mechanical and chemical apparatus, he exclaimed:

> On reading these beautiful and imaginative lines, who will say with Wordsworth, that there is no poetry in a steam engine?‡

Remarks of that sort, which might seem canny comments if taken alone, lose their point in Medwin's use through his promiscuous application of the praise which they imply.

An interesting example of Medwin's usual method may be seen in the following:

> It may be here remarked that the second Mrs. Shelley **(when Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin)** fully coalesced in opinion with Shelley on the score of marriage. . . . She seems indeed after her marriage to have looked back to their illicit intercourse with complacency for in his Dedication to her of **The Revolt of Islam** Shelley says —
>
> How beautiful and calm and free thou wert
> In thy young wisdom, when the **mortal chain**
> Of custom thou didst burst and rend in twain
> And walked as free as light the clouds among:**

In such a fashion as this it was his custom to reason from the misapplication of fact to the interpretation of poetry, and from the interpretation thus achieved to the establishment of further alleged fact. Mrs. Shelley indeed looked back complacently, but the poem did not say it, and little additional light is thrown upon the poem by our knowledge, derived from other sources, that she did so.

Further instances of alleged fact drawn from poetic fiction follow.

> It is in his own writings, and from them his life may be drawn as in a mirror, that the best insight is to be found of the character of the first Mrs. Shelley. He calls her
>
> A mate with feigned sighs,
> Who fled in the April hour.
>
> In the bitterness of his soul, he exclaims:
>
> Alas! that love should be a blight and snare
> To those who seek all sympathies in one ;
> Such one I sought in vain, — then black despair,
> The shadow of a starless night, was thrown
> Over the world in which I moved alone.††
>
> And we find her in the Epipsychidion thus allegorized:

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* Medwin's **Life,** pp. 62-63.
† Ibid., p. 65.
‡ Ibid., p. 71.
** Ibid., p. 97.
†† From the dedication to **The Revolt of Islam.**

Then one whose voice was venomed melody
Sate by a well, under blue night-shade bowers,
Her touch was as electric poison — flame
Out of her looks into my vitals came,
And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
A killing air that pierced like honeydew
Into the core of my green heart, and lay
Upon its leaves, until as **hair grown grey**
On a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
With ruins of unseasonable time.*

Mr. Forman, the editor, thought this last a misapplication of the lines; perhaps he did not notice how Medwin settled the matter with his italics! But at least Medwin should have known that it was of this poem that Shelley remarked that poetry of flesh and blood should not be expected of him, since he did not "deal in those articles."†

According to Medwin, **Alastor** was in part an expression of Shelley's love-starvation, brought about by the defection of Harriet.

Thou hast a home
Beautiful bird! thou voyagest to thine home!
Where thy sweet mate will twine her downy neck
With thine, and welcome thy return with eyes
Bright in the lustre of their own fond joy.‡

If the earthly Shelley was identical with the Poet in **Alastor,** well and good; but, if so, farewell the "lone Chorasmian shore," and the pursuit of ideal beauty in the spirit; the poem becomes mere transcription of biographical fact.

The biographer also discovered the threatened destitution of 1814 in **The Cenci** and in **Rosalind and Helen** — in the lines about the incapacities of a rich man's son in the former work and in the poverty passage of the latter. Yet we recognize these, of course, as the two most consistently objective poems that Shelley wrote, although the latter did deal with the experiences of Mary Shelley and Isabel Baxter.**

Having defined **Alastor** as "a reflex of all the wild, and wonderful, and lovely scenes drawn with a master hand, which he had witnessed" (Caernarvonshire, the Alps, the Rhine, the Thames), Medwin produced his most significant attempt, thus far, at real interpretation:

> It has been said of a great German author, I believe Herder, That he had but one thought, and that was the Universe. May it not be observed of Shelley, that he had but one thought, and that was Love — Love in its most comprehensive sense, — Love, the sole law that should govern the moral world, as it does the universe. . . .
>
> Love was his very essence. He worshipped Love. He saw personified in all things animate and inanimate, the love that was his being and his bane. He, under the idealism of the Spirit of Solitude, in **Alastor,** paints his longing after the discovery of his antetype, the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of his own; an imagination which could enter upon, and seize the subtle and delicate peculiarities which he had delighted to cherish and unfold in secret; with a frame, whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice ,should vibrate with the vibration of his own, and a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands. He thirsted after his likeness — and he found it not, — no bosom that could dive into the fountains of his soul's deep stores, hold intercourse or communion with his soul; the language of all in whom he had expected to meet with these qualities, seemed as of a distant and a savage land. — unintelligible sounds, that could make no music to his ear, could waken no chord of music in his thoughts; when he spoke, words of mute and motionless ice replied to words quivering and burning with the heart's best food. It was with this feeling of despair and disappointment, that he sought in Nature what it had been a vain and fruitless hope to discover among his kind. Yet in Nature, in the solitude of Nature, — in the trees, the flowers, the grass, the waters and the sky, in every motion of the green leaves of spring, there was heard, inaudible to others, a voice that gave back the echo of his own; insensible to others, there was felt a secret correspondence with his self. There was an eloquence in the tongueless wind . . . in the blue depth of noon, and in the starry night, that bore a mysterious relation to something within him, awakened his spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and filled his eyes with tears of tenderness. But a time came when the
>
> Mother of this unfathomable world,

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* Medwin, pp. 124-125.
† See the Cambridge edition, p. 298.
‡ Medwin, p. 126.
** See H. F. B. Brett-Smith's Introduction (p. xxvi) to Peacock's **Memoirs,** London, Frowde, 1909, for a further discussion of Medwin's method of critico-biography.

as he calls Nature, no longer sufficed to satiate the cravings of her favorite son.*

This inept, sentimental, and amorphous passage, with the quotation from **Alastor** which followed it, seized upon certain lines in the poem and certain ideas in the prose fragment **On Love** and shamelessly predicated them of Shelley himself. The assumption was that Shelley and his works were identical, in an identity complicated by no inconvenient elements of conscious art or detached objectivity; perhaps never has a writer been more completely merged with his own creations than was Shelley by Medwin.

Of the lines on Mont Blanc, Medwin wrote:

> The language is Titanic. It is a legion of wild thoughts, a scene that makes the brain of the reader dizzy, and his flesh creep to contemplate; so truthful is the picture, so naturally do the gigantic ideas that belong to it, arise, that Prometheus might have thus apostrophized on the Caucasus.†

The passage is characteristic of his bombastic style.

It was his purpose to show that Shelley's "peculiar tenets" were derived from Plato, and in the proof of that truism he included the opinions that Shelley had also derived something from Schiller's "Ideal and Actual," and that, in his turn, he had influenced Byron. The **Hymn to Intellectual Beauty** was the poem which occasioned this comment; Medwin regarded it as the embodiment of Shelley's philosophical system. After lengthy quotations from the **Symposium** and from the notes to **Childe Harold** in proof of these points,he characterized Shelley's philosophy in the following passage, and thereafter trailed off into a discussion of German thought and thinkers:

> . . . Lord Byron was, with the bulk of mankind, a believer in the existence of matter and spirit, which Shelley so far refined, upon the theory of Berkley, as to superadd thereto some abstraction, of which, not as a substitute for Deity, according to Mr. Moore, but as a more exalted idea of the attributes of Deity, the bishop never dreamed; thus differing from the Pantheism of Wordsworth and Coleridge, inasmuch, as on the deification of Nature, found in their early works, Shelley built a deeper and more ethereal philosophy, rendering not only the whole creation into spirit, but worshipping it under the idealism of Intellectual Beauty and Universal Love.‡

Upon this basis Shelley proposed to erect, and, wrote Medwin, did build

> an untried system in poetry, which he had conceived at Oxford, on reading Plato — from a translation, Mr. Hogg says, before he could master the original; a system not built on nonentities, as styled by Mr. Moore, with his materialist ideas, but the types of **Him** who is all beauty and love — types that are brought home to every deeply thinking mind — a system whose elements are the most comprehensive and spirit-stirring, and to which he ever remained true.**

Medwin was right, of course, in specifying the influence of Plato, and in indicating that Shelley's system of abstractions, while based upon nature, transcended the simplest type of pantheism; it would seem that he went too far beyond this in suggesting that Shelley proposed a "system" of poetry or that he was revealing consciously, through the superior vision of the poet, the higher and brighter aspects of a God otherwise identical with the orthodox conception.

We shall see that in his last years Medwin became increasingly anxious to reconcile Shelley's religious philosophy with the accepted faith.

Of **Prince Athanase** and its connection with the **Revolt of Islam,** Medwin wrote:

> The fragment of Prince Athanase is valuable, as the first conception of a great picture by a great master. In this sketch of the prince, we find the germs of the character of Laon. Athanase is a youth nourished in dreams of liberty, animated by a resolution to confer the boons of civil and religious liberty on his fellow men; and the poet doubtless meant to have created for him a companion endued with the same enthusiasm.
>
> A lovelier creature than Cythna, heart never conceived — a purer love than those of Laon and Cythna words could not express. The story I shall not analyse — it is indeed treated with the simplicity of Grecian art, and might have furnished Thorwaldsen with a subject for a series of **bas reliefs.**††

In the pursuit of his consistent method of relating poetry to biographical fact, Medwin attributed much of the excellence of the Roman poems — and quite correctly

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* Medwin, p. 140.
† Ibid., p. 163.
‡ P. 165.
** Pp. 165-166.
†† Pp. 192-193.

— to inspiring environment. In this connection he rendered his brief discussion of **Prometheus Unbound.**

> But the Praxitelean shapes of the Vatican and the Capitol, were alike sources whence he drew his inspiration in this truly classical drama; a bold and successful attempt, not so much to revive a lost play of AEschylus, as to make the allegory a medium for developing his abstruse and imaginative theories — an object he never lost sight of in any of his poems. . . . Mrs. Shelley has given so excellent an analysis of this drama, that it would be vain for me to attempt it. Shelley believed, with Schiller, that mankind had only to will, and that there should be no evil, and would be none. [sic] That man could be so perfectionised as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of creation, was the cardinal point of his system; and he had so conquered himself, and his own passions, that he was a living testimony to the truth of his doctrine. Such he had depicted Laon, the enemy and victim of tyranny in **The Revolt of Islam,** and here took a more idealised image of the same subject in **Prometheus,** typifying a being full of fortitude and hope, and the spirit of triumph, emanating from a reliance in the ultimate omnipotence of good.*

The Furies, Medwin thought, Shelley should not have used in the play, inasmuch as Prometheus, by his very fortitude, was beyond the reach of their torments. He preferred the Bia and Cratos of the **Prometheus Bound,** but admitted a difficulty even in their use, for

> . . . it would have been an arrant failure, and daring plagiarism, to have made them speak; for what words would not have been a pale adumbration of that which Shelley knew to be inimitable?†

Medwin may be allowed what might otherwise seem a pedantic and egotistic suggestion, for he was an industrious translator of AEschylus.

> Not to dwell on this — I will add, that with all its choral magnificence, a strain of inspiration that is totally unreachable by the greatest spirits of this or any other age, this sublime poem fell almost dead from the press.‡

And here, again, cropped up the "Who would bind it?" joke.

The Cenci Medwin left to the "masterly critique" by Leigh Hunt in the **Indicator** (July 26, 1820), and added only a pointless quotation, an opinion that the play was not for the stage because no one could endure to see it acted, and an expression of his belief that in quality of genius Shelley was not fitted to continue, as Mrs. Shelley had wished him to, in the composition of the drama of human interest.** Later he attributed the style of the play to Shelley's studies in the Elizabethans.

Shelley's works as a translator also came in for Medwin's enthusiastic praise, especially some fragments from the Italian, one of which Medwin had written, but which was offered for the interest of the corrections by Shelley which it contained. It is worthy of notice that Medwin thought comparison with the translations of Professor Wilson, which had appeared in **Blackwood's,** the highest praise.††

The Witch of Atlas he thought a masterpiece of "lyrical harmony and fancy"; the odes, incomparable.

> His odes to Liberty, and Naples, have nothing in our language that can compete with them. They have the merit of being — what few or none of our modern odes (miscalled) are — odes constructed on the models left us by Pindar and Horace, and worthy of the best times of Greece and Rome; and have only one fault, that, alas! they were not prophetic, — that his aspirations were unfulfilled, that bloodshed and anarchy followed in the train of the Spanish revolution, and that that of Naples was soon put down by Austrian bayonets.‡‡

And this, of course, led Medwin back to the glory and true praise of Shelley's liberty-loving character.

In his comment upon the seditious **OEdipus Tyrannus,** which he thought "quite in the spirit of Aristophanes," he pronounced that poem entirely harmless "as regards the public, who could not possibly understand it!" Shelley indeed had little chance of a public if this, most exoteric of his works, was incomprehensible; and the more did he deserve one if this least of his poems was worthy of comparison with the master of ancient comedy.

In the original edition of Medwin's book, in 1847, there was little critical comment upon the **Epipsychidion,** beyond the insistence, expressed with profuse references to Dante, Petrarch, and Plato, that the love glorified in the poem was purely "Platonic."

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* P. 213.
† P. 214.
‡ P. 214.
** See pp. 217-221.
†† Ibid., pp. 246-249. See also p. 384.
‡‡ Ibid., p. 253.

Later in his life, Medwin added in the margin of his copy the following note, intended for inclusion in a new edition:

> In the **Epipsychidion** Shelley exhibits the same imperious longing to fly, beyond the created world into another Universe more perfect, such as the Soul that loves pants to enjoy. We find in it the same hope of a solitary paradise so often dreamed of by young hearts when the storms and frosts of life have never obtained access, where the stars in the unalterable azure smile unceasingly on the lovers for ever intoxicated with each other, when the flowers of thought shoot forth by the side of terrestrial flowers, when the Nightingale, that invented the Songship of happy nights, marries with the far-off murmur of the waves the flood of her joyous Serenades. Shelley invites the beautiful recluse to an existence of love and leisure — The bark is waiting ready, the wind is fair — which wait for you, unfortunate victim. Hark the Song of the Mariners, behold the Halcyons, a fortunate presage hovering over the calm surface of the waters. Soul of my Soul, let us hide our happiness beneath the shadows of the aromatic woods of our blooming isle. — It waits for us there below, at the Eastern horizon reddening in the fires of morning like a bride in the arms of her adventurous spouse who is about to lift the last veil. But Emilia's term of bondage was on the eve of expiring; she was affianced to a man whom she had never seen . . .*

— and so back to the biography, Shelley's letters, and his concern for the earthly Emilia. In spite of his insistence upon Platonic affection, Medwin was not able to forget the story behind it, to avoid the comment upon factual cause-and-effect, or to omit the human implication. The passage, in its utter blindness to all in the poem except its meaning for the past event, and in its strained and senile eloquence, was a pathetic avowal of Medwin's dependence upon Shelley's fame for his own morsel of literary reputation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Medwin's "notice" of **Adonais** should have concerned itself almost entirely — except for a reference to the idea of intellectual beauty, the "one" and the "many" — with the personal connections of the poem: the self-portrait, the "prophecy" of its author's approaching fate, the indication of his attitude toward blood-thirsty reviewers.†

Hellas, of course, received the eulogy due its lyric intervals, the last of which Medwin quoted in part.

> The Choruses are wonderfully imaginative, and melodious in their versification, and splendidly exemplify his peculiarity of style. Whether Byron's "Isles of Greece" suggested the closing Chorus, I know not. . . . What is this glorious hymn . . . but another "Isles of Greece?" indeed it yields in nothing to Byron's strain; and the prophecy is such as poets love to dwell upon, and Shelley most of all, — the regeneration of mankind, though clouded with the melancholy foreboding of the horrors that the struggle must cost. It is impossible to tell how much this drama and the enthusiasm of Shelley, influenced the determination of Byron to devote his energies to the sacred cause.‡

In making his summary of Shelley's qualities, Medwin made free use of the writings of preceding critics, quoting at large without acknowledgment, except to Leigh Hunt. The portion of the summary which he himself wrote was added, in part, after the edition of 1847.

> It is no difficult task to characterise, in its general aspect, the Poetry of Shelley, for its tendencies were clear, its origins known, its progress uniform, his types openly avowed. Greece stands first in his estimation, the imposing grandeur of the Ancient Tragedy, the majestic serenity of Plato and Homer, the Bible with its oriental splendour, its bold imagery, the impetuous energy of its inspired Verses — the Italian era of Dante, the English era of Milton, in Spanish Calderon, in German Schiller and Goethe, in French the Sceptics of the 18th Century, not as enlightened philosophers but as Apostles of Reason, as courageous enemies of tyranny in all its forms — Such were the admired models of Shelley. . . . Guided by them, and less original perhaps than he wished to be, he continued the work abandoned by Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge, whom he taunts with their apostacy. He fought by the side of Lord Byron, but with an enthusiasm more sincere, a faith in the progress of humanity, a sympathy for the human race, which the last never knew. . . . **All** the poems indeed of Shelley, numerous as they are, resolve themselves into one of which they may be regarded as so many separate Cantos. They present to the mind in their different episodes, their accidental details, or sites or costumes, but one type, always equally sublime, that of a man who devotes himself, suffers and dies for his fellow beings, a Christ deprived of his divine attributes, a philosophic Martyr, a Confessor of Liberty. It is to be remarked also that

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* Ibid., pp. 287-288.
† Ibid., pp. 308-310.
‡ Ibid., pp. 354-355.

as years ran on, his Hymns lost their original asperity. Like a brilliant metal which rejects and leaves in the bottom of the burning furnace its black scoriae, the love of Shelley for his kind disengaged itself from all its bitterness and all its hate. . . . The Revolutions which he invokes are treated as worthy of a regenerated world — He wishes them to be pure of all Vengeance, of all violent expiation — The strange truths which he went out to seek in undiscovered lands are almost like those from which other enthusiasts have derived the principle of Christianity. He speaks as a brother to all men, to those even who have repulsed the dogma of fraternity.*

This passage is the key to Medwin's method. He used the poetry of Shelley as a sort of gorgeous scholium upon the poet's life and character, making free use of it in support of trivial fact, in illustration of an isolated quality of character, and in final and incontrovertible proof of the magnanimity and superlative goodness of Shelley the Man.

After emphasis upon the intellectual quality of the poet's writings, and upon his disinterested idealism, Medwin came at last to more specific discussion of certain of his philosophical elements and their consequences in his work.

It is not to his general system of AEsthetics to which I would extend my remarks, so much as to his theory of Intellectual Beauty and Universal Love, a theory which he interweaves in the woof of his poetry, and that indeed forms the ground-work of the web. Schiller's Kantism was too cold and obscure — Shelley's Platonism too mystic and ethereal; it admitted of no demonstration, was too profound and visionary to be reduced to reason, was only to be seized by the spirit, only a glimpse of it to be caught by contemplation and abstraction. . . . Shelley did not condescend to enlighten his readers. Having committed a grave error in penning his Notes to **Queen Mab**, he never ventured on a second experiment, though perhaps his Poems for the general reader more require them, and may furnish abundant materials for some future commentator. His great master, Plato, searching after truth in the greatest heights and lowest depths, often but partially seized it, being defeated by its very vastness; ambitious to reveal it to mankind, he hesitated not to exhibit it in the form, and with the completeness he best could. It was necessary therefore, that what he but half knew himself, should be imperfect and darkly stated, and dimly comprehended by others. . . . But Plato did not aim at darkness, any more than Shelley. If any one understood Plato, it was Shelley, and that which appears a wordy mist glowing in rainbow clouds, was to his own mind as clear and palpable as the sublimity of such contemplations was capable of being made. But how few can appreciate or comprehend him, — how inadequate and imperfect is all language, to express the subtilty and volatility of such conceptions of the Deity! To the generality of readers, his Metaphysics are so overlaid and buried beneath a poetic phraseology, that the mind, while it is undoubtedly excited, is left in a pleasing and half bewildered state, with visions of beautiful divine truth floating before it, which it is a vain attempt to arrest and convert to reality.

The fault of his system as the groundwork of life, is, that it requires intellects on a par with his own to receive it.†

The very vagueness therefore, in which Shelley's imagination revelled, and for which he is wrongly blamed, is more the fault of language, than his own — ever the fate of the Finite when speaking of the Infinite. It was a sense of the impossibility, and what he deemed the sacrilege of attempts to materialize God, that made him substitute for the popular representation of a God in the form of man, a pervading principle, — not as Mr. Moore calls it, "some abstract **nonentity** of love and beauty, as a substitute for Deity," but as an attribute of Deity itself, resolving with Berkley, the whole of creation into spirit. For this reason he has been called an Atheist.‡

Thus Medwin held with those who believed that Shelley's atheism was no more than his adherence to a conception of God so refined and sublimated as to seem unreal, or at least, incomprehensible, to the ordinary mind.

The finest summary of the poet's nature, quoted by Medwin from an unacknowledged source, he thought to have been written by Carlyle. He made it his own, and it is better than any that he himself could have composed:

"That fantastic spirit, which would bind all existence in the visionary chain of intellectual beauty, became in Shelley the centre in which his whole intellectual and sensitive powers were united for its formation and embellishment; and although in painting the romance, the conceits and diversi-

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* Ibid., pp. 419-420.
† Ibid., pp. 424-425.
‡ Ibid., p. 426.

ties, the workings and meanderings of a heart penetrated with such an ideal passion, drawing less upon our individual sympathies than on those of social life, he may be liable to a charge of a certain mannerism; there is not the less evident, the delicacy, elasticity, and concentration of a gentle and noble mind, a deep scorn of all that is vulgar and base, and a lofty enthusiasm for liberty and the glory of his country, for science and for letters; and finally an insatiable longing after an eternal and incorruptible being, which opposed to his persuasion of the misery and nullity of this world, feeds and maintains that tension or struggle, that fire at the core, which is the inheritance of all privileged geniuses, the promoters of their age. Hence that restlessness coupled with the disdain of worldly things, that retirement and misanthropy joined to benevolence, and the yearning after love and affection, the pursuit of fame, and the intolerance of contemporary criticism, in conjunction with real and unaffected modesty; and in fine, that contrast of virtue and weakness, which is the inheritance of flesh, so requisite seemingly to level the more sublime capacity with its fellow-creatures, and to inculcate the religious bond of union which Christian charity ought to inspire."*

Mingled with this and Medwin's own remarks were many other quoted passages from the earlier criticism — from Hunt, from Redding's memoir in the Galignani edition, and from the Biographical Preface to **The Beauties of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** published by Stephen Hunt in London in 1830. These last two memoirs, discussed elsewhere, went back to Hunt and Mrs. Shelley for their content and attitudes; it was therefore upon Leigh Hunt that Medwin chiefly drew. The passages he selected, with the most vague acknowledgment or with none, to supplement his own, were such as praised most highly the genius of the poet without descending to specific discussion of poems, and such as best established the almost saintly conception of his character. Such passages, we have seen, were in keeping with Medwin's procedure and aim. His criticism consisted principally in the use of the poems and the best opinions of Shelley as a poet for a variety of biographical purposes; his analysis of the poet was always second to his glorification of the man.

EDWARD JOHN TRELAWNEY

Trelawney was no critic. His contribution to the Shelley Memorial was to set down a few intimate records, in the words of Shelley himself and some of his contemporaries, which possibly served to clarify the poet's attitudes and philosophies, to augment the "Ariel" legend, and to substantiate the belief that Shelley, by reason of the perfect spiritual identity of the man with his writings, was not adequately to be interpreted as a poet until he should be known as a man.†

His account of Shelley was introduced with an anecdote, from the summer of 1819, of a young German-educated bookseller of Lausanne, a great reader and diligent student, who could understand "your modern poets, Byron ,Scott, and Moore," but who discovered that Shelley's **Queen Mab,** which Trelawney found him reading, made him "stop to take breath and think" in order to fathom it. He had settled upon this book because of the explosion of a browsing priest in his lumber-room, who had exclaimed upon glancing at it, "Infidel, jacobin leveller; nothing can stop this spread of blasphemy but the stake and the fagot; the world is retrograding into accursed heathenism and anarchy!" "Surely," the young bookseller had thought, "there must be something here worth tasting. No person throws a stone at a tree that does not bear fruit."

> 'To my taste,' said the bookseller, 'the fruit is crude, but well flavored; it requires a strong stomach to digest it. The writer is an enthusiast, and has the true spirit of a poet; he aims at regenerating, not, like Byron and Moore, levelling mankind. They say he is but a boy, and this his first offering. If that be true, we shall hear of him again.'‡

Later, upon meeting Wordsworth at Lausanne, Trelawney had "asked him, abruptly, what he thought of Shelley as a poet."

> 'Nothing,' he replied, as abruptly.
> Seeing my surprise, he added, 'A poet who has not produced a good poem before he is twenty-five we may conclude cannot, and never will do so.'
> 'The Cenci,' I said eagerly.
> 'Won't do,' he replied, shaking his head as he got into the carriage. . . .

Whereupon Trelawney fell into meditation upon the jealousy of brother poets.

I did not then know that the full-fledged author never reads the writings

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* Ibid., pp. 431-432. The source was **Fraser's Magazine,** Vol. 3, p. 531.
† **Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron.** Second edition, Boston, 1859.
‡ **Last Days,** pp. 7-9.

of his contemporaries, except to cut them up in a review, — that being a work of love. In after years, Shelley being dead, Wordsworth confessed this fact; he was then induced to read some of Shelley's poems, and admitted that Shelley was the greatest master of harmonious verse in our modern literature.*

A different sort of appreciation was here recorded from Byron:

'Today I had another letter warning me against the Snake. He, alone, in this age of humbug, dares stem the current, as he did today the flooded Arno in his skiff, although I could not observe he made any progress. The attempt is better than being swept along, as all the rest are, with the filthy garbage scoured from its banks.'†

The remark was doubtless set down by Trelawney in simple tribute to the noble unselfishness of Shelley; it suggests that his spiritual rightmindedness was seen by a few, though his views might be damned by others as subversive of the social order. It was not impossible for Shelley's contemporaries to perceive that he was right on many points of social correction; but those chiefly seem to have seen it who were convicted by the poet's character, rather than those who judged him by the message of his verse.

Trelawney insisted throughout upon the fact of Shelley's endowment with genius, upon his purity of character, and, occasionally, upon his tragic loneliness.

> In the annals of authors I cannot find one who wrote under so many discouragements as Shelley; for even Bunyan's dungeon walls echoed the cheers of hosts of zealous disciples on the outside ,whereas Shelley could number his readers on his fingers. . . . The utter loneliness in which he was condemned to pass the largest part of his life would have paralyzed any brains less subtilized by genius than his were.‡

And yet Shelley was one author whose personal acquaintance would have been peculiarly inspiring to readers and friends.

> To know an author, personally, is too often but to destroy the illusion created by his works. If you withdraw the veil of your idol's sanctuary, and see him in his night-cap, you discover a querrulous old crone, a sour pedant, a supercilious coxcomb, a servile tuft-hunter, a saucy snob, or, at best, an ordinary mortal. . . . Shelley was a grand exception to this rule. To form a just idea of his poetry, you should have witnessed his daily life; his words and actions best illustrated his writings. If his glorious conceptions of Gods and men constituted an atheist, I am afraid all that listened were little better.**

Shelley's atheism was characterized, in the poet's own words, as a mere gesture of rebellion; the statement is substantiated by Hogg's account of the Oxford days. Said Shelley,

> "It ['atheist'] is a word of abuse to stop discussion, a painted devil to frighten the foolish, a threat to intimidate the wise and good. I used it to express my abhorrence of superstition; I took up the word as a gauntlet, in defiance of injustice. The delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality; they limit thought."††

That Shelley consistently lived and practised the theories in which he held belief was Trelawney's most significant conclusion;

> He fearlessly laid bare those mysterious feelings and impulses of which few dare to speak, but in a form so purified from earthly matter that the most sensitive reader is never shocked. Shelley says of his own writings, in the preface to the Cenci, 'They are little else than visions which impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just, — they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be.'

Trelawney, in a book which was far removed from professed literary criticism, thus propagated that legend of the "Eternal Child" which colored many of the later sentiment views of Shelley; he is significant for that if for no other reason. For him, poet and poems were identical in spirit. Portrait of one was exegesis of the other. He raises the old critical question of the manner in which biographical matter should be used in the evaluation of literature. Our position is that poetry ought to be **judged as to value** in terms only of intrinsic merit, but that for its **understanding** personal and historical circumstances ought to be known and used. We interpret the poem in terms of these and its own words and effect; we evaluate it only in terms

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* Ibid., pp. 13-14.
† Ibid., pp. 43-44. Cf. Byron's defence of Shelley's character in letters to Moore and Murray: Medwin's **Life,** p. 428.
‡ Ibid., p. 54.
** Ibid, p. 61.
†† Ibid., pp. 63-64.

of its aspect in the light of the best poetry of its kind. Mrs. Shelley used biographical methods for interpretation; Trelawney would apparently have us use them for evaluation.

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

In contrast with the emotionalism of most of the other members of the circle, Thomas Love Peacock seems almost cold-blooded. His **Memoirs of Shelley*** was in the nature of a brief and irregular biographical sketch, issued originally in review of the books of Trelawney, Hogg, and Middleton, and of the **Shelley Memorials.** The book was devoted primarily to the correction, from documents and personal knowledge, of the factual errors of those preceding biographies. A few passages only, throw light upon Peacock's estimate of the poetry.

At the beginning was given a comparison of Shelley's **Skylark** and Wordsworth's **Cuckoo,** indicating Peacock's opinion that the first of these poems was probably influenced by the second. Medwin's alteration of date and title of the poem "On F. G.", to make it accord with his exaggerated view of the Harriet Grove affair, was corrected by Peacock, but with no critical remarks beyond those on Medwin's inaccuracies. Of the possible origin of Shelley's passion against tyranny, both governmental and churchly, he had an interesting suggestion to offer:

> Shelley never came, directly or indirectly, under any authority, public or private, for which he entertained, or had much cause to entertain, any degree of respect. His own father, the Brentford schoolmaster, the head master of Eton, the Master and Fellows of his college at Oxford, the Lord Chancellor Eldon, all successively presented themselves to him in the light of tyrants and oppressors.†

Peacock thought that possibly the Reverend Mr. Edwards had left Shelley with "a sort of poetical regard for country clergymen," but we remember that it was Dr. Lind who constituted the sole example in Shelley's poetry of the benevolent sage, and that the tyrannous aspect of all authorized persons was a part of the **effect** of Shelley's own attitude, as well as a probable part of the **cause.**

One significant statement of Peacock introduced what may have been an important spiritual and literary influence upon Shelley — his inordinate admiration of Charles Brockden Brown.

> The superstitious terror of romance could scarcely be more strongly excited than by the perusal of **Wieland.** . . . He devotedly admired Wordsworth and Coleridge, and in a minor degree Southey: these had great influence on his style, and Coleridge especially on his imagination; but admiration is one thing and assimilation is another; and nothing so blended itself with the structure of his interior mind as the creations of Brown. Nothing stood so clearly before his thoughts as a perfect combination of the purely ideal and possibly real as Constantia Dudley.‡

Constantia Dudley is the heroine of Brown's **Ormond.** The reference to the real and ideal woman reminds us of the **Epipsychidion**; and we remember also Shelley's passion for the Gothic novel; but there is nothing Gothic in his idealism of women, and it may well be questioned whether Peacock is not speaking from an **a priori** understanding of Shelley's peculiarities rather than from an observed influence upon his poetry.

In connection with **Alastor,** Peacock was concerned only with explaining the meaning of the title, which he himself had suggested. The poem may justly be interpreted as containing two conceptions: the necessity of human sympathy, and the pursuit of ideal beauty. The second of these, artistically the more important, Peacock did not mention.

> The poem treated the spirit of solitude as a spirit of evil. I mention the true meaning of the word because many have supposed Alastor to be the name of the hero of the poem.**

Peacock's record of one of his remarks carries the suggestion of Shelley's belief in his own philosophy as a practical medium for the propagation of truth. Shelley had said,

> "It is very hard on a man who has devoted his life to the pursuit of truth, who has made great sacrifices and incurred great sufferings for it, to be treated as a visionary."††

The remark had been made in connection with Shelley's improbable account of a

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* London, Frowde, 1909, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith.
† **Memoirs,** p. 34.
‡ Ibid., pp. 35-37.
** Ibid., pp. 55-56.
†† Ibid., p. 57.

visit by Williams to Bishopgate, which story Peacock had taken to be the result of an illusion on the part of Shelley; that Shelley regarded his poetry as quite as close to earthly fact as his story about Williams may not be decided from this one utterance. But at least it indicates that Shelley did not think of himself as a visionary.*

Following a passage in praise of Shelley's Italian letters and his power of language, there was a brief discussion of two of the poems: .

> He described these [Italian] scenes with extraordinary power of language, in his letters as well as in poetry; but in the latter he peopled them with phantoms of virtue and beauty, such as never existed on earth. One of his most striking works in this kind is the **Prometheus Unbound.** He only once descended into the arena of reality, and that was in the tragedy of the **Cenci.** This is unquestionably a work of great dramatic power, but it is as unquestionably not a work for the modern English stage. It would have been a great work in the days of Massinger. . . . But he could not clip his wings to the littleness of the acting drama. . . . If his life had been prolonged, I still think he would have accomplished something worthy of the best days of theatrical literature. If the gorgeous scenery of his poetry could have been peopled from actual life, if the deep thoughts and strong feelings which he was so capable of expressing, had been accommodated to characters such as have been and may be, however exceptional in the greatness of passion, he would have added his own name to those of the masters of the art.†

In the discussion of Shelley's prose, Peacock did well to point out the fact, which has been more frequently remarked of Byron than of Shelley, that the poet had been fond of describing the more rugged and awful aspects of the natural world.

The **Memoirs** ended with prose poetry and a flourish.

> So perished Percy Bysshe Shelley, in the flower of his age, and not perhaps even yet in the full flower of his genius; a genius unsurpassed in the description and imagination of scenes of beauty and grandeur; in the expression of impassioned love of ideal beauty; in the illustration of deep feeling by congenial imagery; and in the infinite variety of harmonious versification. What was, in my opinion, deficient in his poetry, was, as I have already said, the want of reality in the characters with which he peopled his splendid scenes, and to which he addressed or imparted the utterance of his impassioned feelings. He was advancing, I think, to the attainment of this reality. It would have given to his poetry the only element of truth which it wanted; though at the same time, the more clear development of what men were would have lowered his estimate of what they might be, and dimmed his enthusiastic prospect of the future destiny of the world. I can conceive him, if he had lived to the present time, passing his days like Volney, looking on the world from his windows without taking part in its turmoils; and perhaps like the same, or some other great apostle of liberty . . . desiring that nothing should be inscribed on his tomb, but his name, the dates of his birth and death, and the single word, 'DESILLUSIONE!‡

Thus Peacock wrote of Shelley with the calm aloofness of a confident man of letters. His chief purpose was the correction of error in preceding biography. Incidentally, he reported a few circumstances in Shelley's life which may have influenced his poetry, such as the tyranny of age over the poet's youth and the fondness for Charles Brockden Brown; but his method differed from Medwin's in that Peacock used facts known by him to be true and did not derive those facts from the poetry for the interpretation of which they were to be used. His most important criticism coincided with that of Leigh Hunt: Shelley had not made use of the materials of ordinary realism for the purpose of human appeal, and had become therefore a less effective poet and a less popular one than he might otherwise have been. This criticism, though sound with respect to some of the commonly recognized ends of poetic composition, was inspired by what may be called poetic utilitarianism, and that of a different type from the purposefulness of Shelley as we have seen it. It not only deprecated what may be regarded as Shelley's weakness of abstraction, but also implied disagreement with his poetic theory. It did not judge Shelley in terms of the peculiar qualities of his own genius and poetry; it appealed to the generally admitted esthetic ends of poetry rather than to his somewhat different theory and purpose. It tended to become invalid as it departed from the recognition of the poet's aim; it was valid to the extent that all poets must be judged in terms of certain unchanging affective qualities by which their verses live in the public mind.

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* Cf. **A Defence of Poetry,** on the subject of utility.
† **Memoirs,** pp. 71-72.
‡ Ibid., pp. 82-83.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG

Thomas Jefferson Hogg, raconteur and companion of Shelley during the Oxford days, published in 1858 the first two volumes of the authorized biography of the poet, which so displeased the Shelley family that the work was never finished.* The emphasis upon the Oxford period, and the much writing about Thomas Jefferson Hogg himself, brought this half-book to an end before the date of any of Shelley's important writings had been reached. Consequently, and also because Hogg's method was largely anecdotal, there was nothing in the work that might be called criticism, except one passage on Shelley's inspiration and one on his principles of character. Of the matter of inspiration, Hogg wrote:

> Shelley is the only modern poet whose verses uniformly appear to be inspired; no other poet of recent times is so completely and universally under the influence of inspiration. The earliest, the most hasty, the least finished, the most unformed and irregular of his poems have, notwithstanding their manifold defects, something superhuman about them. They seem to have been breathed, not by a mere mortal, but by some god or demon. His writings are invariably demoniacal, plainly the compositions of a demoniacal man. The least striking and complete of his productions has a preternatural air and tone. Of other poets, his contemporaries, the masterpieces are sometimes good, very good indeed; it would be unjust to deny it. But the trundling of a wheelbarrow cannot be compared to the pace of a racehorse, to the bounding of an antelope, or to the flight of an eagle. . . .†

Of the principles of Shelley, with which Hogg found the world in vociferous disagreement, he wrote:

> I knew Shelley more intimately than any man, but I never could discern in him any more than two fixed principles. The first was a strong, irrepressible love of liberty; of liberty in the abstract, and somewhat after the pattern of the ancient republics, without reference to the English constitution, respecting which he knew little and cared nothing, heeding it not at all. The second was an equally ardent love of toleration of all opinions, but more especially of religious opinions; of toleration, complete, entire, universal, unlimited; and, as a deduction and corollary from which latter principle, he felt an intense abhorrence of persecution of every kind, public or private. He certainly was at all times prone to discuss, to attack, or defend the curious speculations which abound in the writings of William Godwin, and of divers French authors of that age, but he never seriously and in good earnest adopted their startling and unhealthy paradoxes.‡

The "inspiration" was simply Shelley's intense emotion and unearthly imagination, described in the jargon of commonplace criticism; the "principles" Hogg merely reduced to their most general and least exceptionable aspects, avoiding thereby any reference to the specific points at which Shelley's love of liberty and tolerance came into conflict with social conventions. There was also the suggestion that Shelley's ideas of social rehabilitation ought not to be designated as "principles." With the general motives behind them Hogg knew that the world could not long keep up its quarrel. But Shelley had certainly at one time been an ardent disciple of the aforementioned radical philosophers.

In these several works the circle of his friends provided the most intimate of all commentaries upon Shelley. Their acquaintance with him entitles their judgments to the most respectful attention; but of most of them it is true that personal knowledge of the poet, if nothing else, incapacitated them for the ablest discussion of his poems. Leigh Hunt was the only member of the circle who left a purely critical discussion of his works, and to Leigh Hunt we have assigned the credit of having been the only contemporary of the poet who presented, within Shelley's lifetime, an adequate study of his work and art. We have seen that, for the most part, Hunt was correct in his evaluation of the poet; that he was especially concerned with the message of the poems; that he filled a sadly needed office in his vigorous public defence of Shelley against attack and misunderstanding; and that he proved that Shelley's works might have been clear and comprehensible to sympathetic readers of his own generation. Mrs. Shelley contributed to the understanding of the poems by an intimate revelation of Shelley's intentions and aims, the qualities of his writing mind, and the environmental influences that helped to mold his work. Medwin's commentary, as we have seen, was both unskilfully written and illogically organized, by reason of the fact that he sought to document his biography from the poems rather than, by the establishment of biographical fact, to provide a lucid approach to the poetry. Trelawney and Peacock provided, the one emotionally and the other coolly,

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* **The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** London, Moxon, 1858.
† Ibid., Vol. II, p. 344.
‡ Ibid., pp. 457-458.

additions to the records of contributing fact and circumstance which were valuable for the understanding of the author's purpose and methods rather than for the final evaluation of his writings. Hogg generalized Shelley's philanthropic zeal, representing it in terms inoffensive to the public mind. None of them established a canon of Shelley interpretation, other than the universal key of the man's character to the knowledge of his work. Most of them, being concerned much with biography, appealed too far **ad hominem.** Their contributions to Shelley criticism were necessarily introductory rather than conclusive. And, inevitably, they turned from the poetry back to the man himself, and made their stand upon his earnestness of character and nobility of purpose.

CHAPTER IV

THE MID-CENTURY VIEW
1840-1860

From the year in which Mrs. Shelley completed her editions of her husband's works until the appearance of Richard Garnett's **Relics of Shelley** in 1862, criticism of the poet appeared chiefly in three very similar forms. The permanent fame of Shelley was repeatedly confirmed by elaborate periodical essays, unprovoked by any very recent Shelley publication, which sought the interpretation of his personality and genius; the issuance from time to time of the writings of the Shelley circle elicited thoughtful and painstaking reviews; and standardizing agencies such as histories of literature and encyclopaedias sought to sum up the admitted knowledge and status of the poet for permanent record.

The conflicting voices of personal connection and temporal proximity were decreasingly heard; the friends of Shelley wrote out of the knowledge of their intimacy, but the essayists and reviewers judged both the poet and his historians from a chiefly impersonal attitude and in terms of a changing concept of poetry and an increasing pride in the new philosophical regularity of method which had come upon critical writers. The growing sentimental legend of the "Eternal Child" clothed the poet himself in a luminous cloud and made lenient the judgments of his errors of thought and action; the poetry itself, coming under the application of a new Tennysonian appreciation of the imaginative for which the influence of Shelley himself was in part responsible, began to be judged by a more sympathetic standard than the old.

The plea for an intrinsic rather than a circumstantial standard of evaluation for poetry was advanced again in the year following the appearance of Shelley's prose by G. H. Lewes, mentor of George Eliot, and an author now famous for his sometimes hasty and ill-considered formulation of critical laws. Writing in the **Westminster Review,** organ of radical philosophy, he denounced the condemnation of Shelley by ordinary standards of morals and art as incongruous and absurd, and set up anew the criterion of innate merit, pleading the while for a sympathetic approach to a misunderstood man.

> The beauty of a poem is in its general truth, its depth of human passion, rather than peculiar idiosyncracies; and where these latter form the staple, they can never have but a relative and insignificant value. Conceiving, therefore, that the poems of Percy Shelley are works stamped with immortality, that they are real poems, we say they must now, as hereafter, stand upon their own basis, uninfluenced by any knowledge of his character. Meanwhile, some general indications may not be without interest — it is always profitable to know the man as well as the poet, if not **necessary.***

The role of Shelley as reformer and searcher after truth was correctly seen by Lewes as the poet's distinctive part; and the value of radical reform, even when impregnated with error, was understood by him; but this view of the prophet in question led him into a dangerous generalization about all poets.

> Truth was the characteristic of his mind and action; to it he sacrificed every worldly advantage; on it he reposed his aching head, and was content. . . . He had the obduracy and strength of a martyr; an angel-martyr, however, not a fanatic. With all the pious vehemence of an apostle, the exaggerated antagonism, and recklessness of wounding people's feelings in speculative points, which characterizes reformers of troubled periods, he joined the most constant sympathy and tolerance of all concrete existence. He hated the abstract lie, but not the individual liar; he was unceasing in his contempt and anger at error, but wept over the erring man. He spoke harshly, abruptly, but it was because he stood forth as a teacher, a reformer, and saw around him men who slept; calm and honied words would but have soothed them in their opium slumbers, so he spoke out! and of the awakened, some pricked their ears and listened, some turned upon their sides and slept on; while others sought to yell him down, to deaden his voice in their execrations. . . . Many are the world old truths that lie deep-seated in the slumber of unconsciousness, which can only be awakened by the startling language of sincerity. And when a man **does** arise to speak in that language from out his full heart, the world had better listen!†

But in his enthusiasm, Lewes would not permit the name of poet to any writer without the Shelleyan bard-like inspiration:

> Poets have in all times and in all ages been the first reformers! and it is only in this high-priest-like character that the poet can appear at all; all the rest are but cunning imitators or disciples.‡

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* **Westminster Review,** 1841, Vol. XXXV, p. 304.
† Ibid., p. 307.
‡ Ibid., p. 308.

This was a broad extension, without the Shelleyan context that gave it unquestioned truth, of Shelley's well-known saying about the poet as legislator of the world.

The comparison with Byron, a regular practice in Shelley interpretation, was, as used by Lewes, very discrediting to the founder of the Satanic School.

> But if we characterize the philosophy of Byron as that of Scorn and Despair, we must call Shelley's the philosophy of Love and Hope. Mankind gain nothing by the utterance of scorn, for it is not only false, but enervating and painful — but great good by the utterance of hope and love, for it is beautiful and ennobling. Thus does Shelley fulfil the poet's mission — Byron debases it. Not only is this true considered as art, but also in its tendencies in the sober philosophy of life.*

The subjective element in Byron was described as posturing vanity; that in Shelley was regarded as unobjectionable and idealized personal revelation, proceeding from the sincere identification of the poet with his message.

> . . . all Shelley's heroes are idealized Shelleys; and it is in his works that one must seek his portrait; yet this is done in so quiet and unobtrusive a manner that the reader never suspects the personality, because the poet is speaking truth, and not fancying what attitude will be the most romantic.†

This was certainly not always true; and the statement would be inaccurate even in description of the modern reader's attitude. The unacceptable nature of Shelley's "truth" forced his earlier audience to the conclusion that personality, or at least personal doctrine, was being offensively obtruded; while the later reader is aware, in most poems, of the ever-present poet, even when his subjective intensity is most nearly identified with the fire of inspiration.

Byron also was found wanting in faith in all things save himself, while Shelley's positive creed was characterized as a dynamic and ethical, though not a dialectic, Christianity.

Finally for the consideration of the man, Shelley was put with Bentham as one of "the two most memorable men of this nineteenth century," and one possessing most eminently Carlyle's quality of the "hero" — the "original man."

> In commanding intellect, in large-heartedness, but above all, in his heroic preaching and fighting for all that was to him truth, at grievous personal cost, but with unabated energy, — he stands out as the most memorable man of his day (a day not wanting in heroism or endurance), calling forth our hero-worship. . . . he arose, and from out his full heart poured the gospel of man — that man **can** be what he **will**. . . . This, coupled with Schelling's fine saying, "Rouse man to the consciousness of what he **is**, and he will soon become what he ought," was the life-giving doctrine he stood forth and taught. . . .‡

So much for Shelley the man. In approaching the poetry Lewes accepted Jouffroy's distinction between philosophy and poetry; he thought poetry that which gives

> utterance in song to the sentiments of the epoch, on the good, the beautiful, and the true. It expresses the indistinct thought of the masses, in a manner that is more vivid, but not more clear, because he feels this thought more vivdly, but comprehends it as little. This is comprehended only by philosophy. If poetry comprehended it, it would become philosophy and disappear.

The purpose of Shelley he described as inspiration, through the medium of this feeling, rather than instruction through a content of thought of philosophy. Whether the description of poetry as unphilosophical be accepted or not, Lewes' essay should be distinguished for its perspicacious characterization of the aims of Shelley's best and most mature poems.

> Shelley does not so much preach as inspire. He knew that it is not what we absolutely learn and can carry away with us, but what we become, which the poet's works effect.**

It was noted that this persistent gospel of inspiration set Shelley quite apart from all the other great Romanticists.

> Shelley alone was the poet standing completely on his truth; giving up his life to it, and eternally preaching it. Look where you will throughout his various works, there you see this gospel ever lying underneath, even under the smallest poems. . . . One may see also from this why these other men, mirroring, as they did, the immediate restlessness and disease of the period, were more **notable** than this other man who was speaking of futurity in

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* Ibid, p. 312.
† Ibid., p. 314.
‡ Ibid., pp. 316-317.
** Ibid., p. 319.

which he could be joined but by the minority; but his fame has been rapidly widening as the morn since his death, and has not yet nearly attained its culminating point.*

The nature of this gospel was generally shadowed forth by Lewes as follows:

> The vital truth Shelley everywhere enforced, although treated as a chimera by most of his contemporaries, and indulged as a dream by some others, has become the dominant Idea — the philosophy and faith of this age, throughout Europe — it is progression, humanity, perfectibility, civilization, democracy — call it what you will — this is the truth uttered unceasingly by Shelley, and universally received by us.

It is remarkable that as early as 1841 Lewes perceived, at least in a general way, a truth which has required argument to support it as late as 1896 — that Shelley's teachings were in prophetic harmony with the directions of civil and humanitarian progress.

The organized method of Lewes' essay is further evident in the distinction which he made between Shelley as poet and Shelley as artist.

> Of his claims as an artist we do not think so highly, for although not one of his contemporaries has produced a single work equal to 'The Cenci,' yet in the artistic parts Shelley was not so great. He had a marvellous command of language, music, and imagery, but in most of his larger poems there is too much glare and brilliancy. . . . Further, one may note a certain want of objectivity. . . . We should characterise his mind as sensitive and reflective, rather than plastic and creative.†

Lewes thought **Queen Mab,** while merely boy's work, expressive of idealism rather than atheism, and pointed out that it was the "God" of superstition which Shelley was attacking. **Alastor** he thought pleasing in its dream-inducing qualities, and devoid of the peculiar views of its author. Of the allegory in **The Revolt of Islam,** he made a lengthy analysis. He considered the poem more successful as an expression of human affection than as a mode of political instruction; the allegory itself he thought more obscure than even allegory should rightly be. In connection with this poem and **The Cenci** he made occasion to praise Shelley's women.

> The character of Cythna in this poem, and Beatrice in the 'Cenci,' may challenge comparison throughout poetry for depth and beauty. To all the undisguised fervour of passion which belongs to a sincere woman, the graces of mind, the beauty of person, and the confiding innocence of nature, Cythna unites a lofty spirit, capable of comprehending the most exalted and far reaching schemes for human improvement; an earnest enthusiasm shines, starlike, in her soul, and a lofty eloquence flows from her lips which shakes and stirs the dullest. . . . Shelley seems to have better understood, and more constantly felt, the true relation of the sexes than any other poet, ancient or modern. . . . with him women are neither slaves nor angels — but women.‡

And yet, we may remark, while the tragic intensity of Beatrice convinces us with realistic horror, Cythna may hardly be called a woman in the same human sense. She is rather an idealization of all the highest traits of womanhood — an apotheosis of beauty, virtue, and inspired devotion; and the representation of life in which she is set is not so much the circumstantial matrix of experience as the Arcadian theater of a yet unrealized experiment. Beatrice is woman before perfectibility has defeated the debasing forces of inherent and environmental evil; Cythna is woman perfected by Shelley's dream.

Of the poem in general, Lewes wrote:

> This poem is the inspiration of liberty. Although the immediate result of the struggle has been the reinstatement of tyranny, yet the word has gone abroad. . . . The grand moral in this poem no doubt is the enforcement of truth and inspiration of liberty; but there is yet another moral lesson taught us . . . that ages of custom, and error, and vice are not to be overturned by a **sentiment,** however beautiful.
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> Laon failed; his very failure, while it showed the futility of the means employed, taught the emphatic lesson that **man** must be first reformed, and then the reform of states will follow. We do not say that Shelley consciously taught this; but the poet writes from intuition, not analysis, and is not always distinctly conscious of what he is shadowing out; yet this meaning lies written in the poem, and is in perfect unison with his opinions; for ardently as he desired the amelioration of mankind, he knew how much was to be cleared away before this could take place. And it is a great mistake

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* Ibid., pp. 320-321.
† Ibid., pp. 321-322.
‡ Ibid., pp. 330-331.

to fancy that he was a demagogue or agitator — he saw with the clearness of sunlight into most things. If his hopes were dreamy — his theories ideal — yet he knew too well the world, and the world's way, to suppose that those hopes could be realized in an equally dreamy manner.*

Here Lewes mentioned the reform pamphlets as relevant evidence of Shelley's grasp upon practical politics; he was one of the earliest critics to use Shelley's philosophic prose in the interpretation of the poet, and his conclusion in this case was both valid and highly original. The distinction between the direct methods of reform, sanely and cannily put forth in the pamphlets on Irish and Parliamentary reform, and the inspirational gospel of the later poems is essential to the correct understanding of Shelley's mind and his discrimination between two widely different fields of creation. His practical sagacity was entirely overlooked by the earlier critics, who had no access to the prose; and it still requires emphasis. In qualification of Lewes' conclusion it may be noted that the early poems were, to a degree, directly didactic, and that the poet did not always observe the distinction between the inspirational and the preceptive methods.

Of **The Cenci** Lewes wrote that it was the "most magnificent tragedy of modern times." Cenci himself he regarded as the personification of evil and yet not an abstraction; he would have preferred to see the Count represented as **all** evil strength, without the fear of Beatrice which he expressed at least once in the course of the play. Beatrice he thought the "incarnation of love and endurance" — angelic where Cenci was diabolic. "With consummate art she is made to believe herself an instrument in the hand of Heaven." Lewes disagreed with Leigh Hunt as to why Beatrice would not confess her guilt; he thought the cause half family pride, since she confessed it readily enough to her relatives, but never to her accusers. This was circumstantially true, though the motive assigned was less subtle than that advanced with equal truth by Hunt — that the "crime" was so essentially righteous that Beatrice was truly **not** guilty of the wickedness expressed in the term "parricide."

With Lewes's conclusion that the play was the best single work of Shelley those who admit his distinction between the poet and the artist may reasonably agree.

> 'The Cenci' must ever remain as the greatest work of our poet, not only negatively, as more free from faults, but positively, as being the most matured and complete.

In taking leave of the play, he conveyed by implication a characterization of tragedy which, aside from its merit as an accepted definition, is interesting as indicating his tendency to formulate critical rules.

> It is not because Beatrice is unhappy that she is a tragic personage. . . . art demands something higher; not merely suffering, but the suffering of great minds, of elevated natures.†

Lewes's essay was marked by enthusiasm, lack of a good and suggestive prose style, multi-lingual learning, minute examination of subtle meanings in certain of the poems, the formulation or suggestion of critical and artistic generalizations, and the exaltation of Shelley as hero and bard rather than as artist. Several important works received little or no mention; **Prometheus Unbound** was dismissed as too mystical; the lyrics were not given proper emphasis. His method consisted in the formulation of critical truth, especially as it was suggested by the universal virtues of Shelley's poems; the general exposition of Shelley's nature as bard; and the somewhat less enthusiastic elucidation of his art, from a few points of concrete interpretation. The generalizations about all poetry were applied as explanatory devices, and further and more original principles were predicated of Shelley's own peculiar art. On the whole, Lewes was more fortunate in his conclusions about poetry in general — which were not always strictly original — than in his specific remarks on the poems. His treatment of Shelley's general significance as poet and bard was much nearer the truth than his discourse upon Shelley as artist. He made two notable contributions to Shelley criticism; he distinguished the aim of spiritual uplift from the mere rash advocacy of social upheaval, and thus clarified Shelley's major purpose; and he used the poet's political prose to indicate that Shelley had been possessed of a chiefly unrecognized practicality. This recognition of the poet's grasp upon reality permitted a significant differentiation between the incommensurable aims of his politically constructive prose and his spiritually constructive poetry.

That eighteenth-century critical tendency, nurtured by the moralistic botanizing and the graveyard sentiment of the earlier romanticists, which conned the prophets of the new thought chiefly for their "natural beauties" followed Shelley into a standard history of English literature as late as 1844.‡ The criticisms by Robert Chambers, which followed a brief sketch of the poet's life, called **Alastor** representative of Shelley's "descriptive" poetry, specified the lack of "human interest" in **The Revolt of Islam**, named **Prometheus Unbound** as an instance of his daring scepticism, and chose **The Cenci** as his greatest work — "incomparably the best" though its "painting

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* Ibid., pp. 334 and 335.

† Ibid., p. 343.

‡ Robert Chambers's **Cyclopaedia of English Literature**, Edinburgh, 1844, Vol. II, pp. 395-397.

is dark and gloomy." Shelley himself was represented as a sincere, benevolent, and impractical visionary, somewhat morbid in his tastes, whose verse would never become popular because of its obscurity, abstraction, and turgidity. The characterization serves here chiefly to emphasize the pioneering foresight of such critics as Lewes, who, in contrast to this "standardizing" author, saw in Shelley more of the prophet than of either the poet or the social libertine, and who perceived in his prophecy and its inspiration that whole luminous side of Shelley's nature which was dark to those who were content to catalogue his parallelisms to **Night Thoughts, The Pleasures of Memory,** and **Gertrude of Wyoming.**

In 1845 there was published a volume of **"Literary Portraits"*** by a minister of the secessionist church, the eleventh of twelve children of a secessionist minister, who was destined to put forth a hundred books and to enjoy a considerable, though impermanent, literary fame. His essay on Shelley in this book is notable for the restraint with which it treated Shelley's abuse of orthodox religion, and for the sympathy with which its author was able to enter into the appreciation of at least the aesthetic aspect of the poet's genius. In a manner which was more than mere frothy enthusiasm over purple passages, and more than mere layman's analysis of technical elements, George Gilfillan was able to convey some knowledge of the qualities of Shelley's art and a conviction that it contained the possibilities for the intelligent reader of an exalted poetic experience. The critic's training had been, of course, in the older poetry; he was editor of many of the more romantic poets of the preceding century, and partook of the qualities of those commentators whom the godly and reverent nature poetry of the precursors of Romanticism had prepared for the Romantic nature-worship but left quite unqualified to receive the Romantic iconoclastic thought . His style was an eloquent Scotch-pulpit elocution, moving though bombastic, bordering always upon pathos and mixed metaphor, but often of penetrating sincerity. In this sincerity we find one cardinal quality of good criticism; in the dispassionate attitude toward controversial elements, another.

George Gilfillan coupled an orthodox opposition to Shelley's doctrines (which, however, was temperately controlled in this essay) with critical discussion of real literary merit. He introduced the poet as a prophet of awful and dynamic sincerity.

> His was a burdened soul; he was the mere organ of the message he bore; and, like one of Ezekiel's wheels, his being moved in the might of an invisible spirit. And it is as much for the sake of his wild sincerity, as for his genius, that, deeply as we disapprove of his theoretical sentiments, we have decided to give him a conspicuous and full niche in our Gallery.†

He appears to have thought Shelley a real atheist, and suggested that that Nature which the bard so venerated should have been enough to convert him to a right mind. However, he was ready to defend the poet from certain current objections to his verse, and these defences were frequently very discerning, and none the less just if expressed somewhat oratorically; for the oratory of the critic would appear to have been quite as sincere as its author deemed the poet.

Shelley was first cleared of a charge of grovelling melancholy:

> One grand objection to Shelley's poetry is its melancholious and whining tone. . . . Shelley was a doubter, a denier, a dogmatiser; but he was no whiner, no blubbering Byronling brat . . . but a working man, or maniac, striving against real or imaginary ills; now with the flush of hope and now with the fury of despair. . . . Shelley was a workman; but such a workman as, in Shinar of old, sought to reach Heaven by piling brick on brick, and mortar on mortar, working, too, alone, under a black sky, and with guardian lightning blinding his eyes.‡

Next the mooted question of his obscurity was considered; and Shelley, if not completely cleared of the charge of "mysticism," which Gilfillan and other critics made equivalent in meaning to "mystification," was done the justice of having his peculiar kind of cloudiness defined and illumined by the critical light.

> Another objection is, that mystic and shadowy obscurity which is said to adhere to his poetry. There are none readier than we to condemn wilful and deliberate mystification; it is the crying sin of our age's literature. . . . But Shelley is seldom guilty of this deliberate 'darkening of counsel.' The masters in the art of obscurity . . . produce it generally by an affected, or by an encumbered, or by a deficient phraseology; now, Shelley's style is one of the purest, most natural, most copious, and most fluent ever written. His command of language is not merely great, but tyrannous: words, the shortest or the longest, the most simple, and the most abstract, Saxon or Latin, wait, winged and obedient, to body forth his rarest and most ethereal conceptions, instead of toiling after them leagues and lustres behind. Of versification, too, he is a perfect master; and we know that, in general, it flowed on him like a swift stream. . . . What, then, is the secret of his obscurity?

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* **A Gallery of Literary Portraits,** by George Gilfillan, Edinburgh, William Tait, 1845. Later designated "First Series."

† P. 73.

‡ P. 76.

> . . . It sprung partly from his extreme subtlety of distinction; partly from the dreamy character of his reading, partly from his passion for interweaving the abstractions of the schools with the living laurels of Parnassus; but principally from his incessant practice of allegory, — a figure into which he was at once seduced by the preternatural liveliness of his imagination, and driven by the daring peculiarity of his opinions. If we try parts of his works by the common standards of descriptive and didactic poetry, the darkness is rayless, solid, impenetrable; but if we regard the whole as one mass of allegories, to which his system forms the master-key, we will not find them more obscure than the "Faery Queen."*

This was lucid and refreshing truth, after the ill-defined attacks of Shelley's avowed enemies; it was the reasonable procedure of one who defines a troublesome question before he tries to answer it. But, best of all, it represented a successful attempt to judge poetry according to the legitimate standard of its own peculiar aim and quality, rather than wholly from the extraneous authority of generalized and partly inapplicable dogma. And it arrived at an unquestionable truth.

Gilfillan found parts of Shelley's poetry, such as **The Cenci, Alastor,** speeches from **Prometheus Unbound,** and the **Ode to Liberty,** more lucid than most of Byron and Wordsworth; while he had the far-sighted critical faith to believe that there might be more in Shelley's writings than was apparent even to his own sympathetic vision. Like a nebula, he wrote, the whole of the poet's work broke up, upon close looking, into a galaxy of splendid suns for those with eyes to see them. But a few of the works he found, at best, unresolvable, as, for example, **The Triumph of Life,** Shelley's "last and worst poem" — "a piece of misty and melancholious madness."†

Of the obscurity that remained even after the preceding interpretation had been applied, the essayist found the cause less in Shelley's innate qualities as a poet than in certain influences proceeding from environment and experience: his, Gilfillan thought, was not the obscurity of Coleridge, Carlyle, Foster, Hazlitt, Byron, De Stael, or Wordsworth —

> but something altogether distinct, partly indigenous . . . and partly acquired; a composite formed less from natural tendency . . . than from the habit of reading German and High Greek; from another habit, relinquished long before death, of eating opium; from an imperfect metaphysics, and from an imagination rendered morbid by a rambling life, by embarrassed circumstances, . . . by calumny and persecution. . . .‡

Shelley's "mysticism," Gilfillan therefore thought, was "not essential to his genius"; it had not "vitiated the general structure of his poetry, nor shadowed a single passage of his prose."**

The unexpected objection that charged Shelley's poetry with a "planless, purposeless character" was then cited by Gilfillan as requiring an answer. It seemed strange to the critic that Shelley's reformatory verses should thus early have had their explicit aims ignored. To the charge Gilfillan replied that Shelley had left few works incomprehensible by reason of incompleteness; that his purposes, though sometimes involved, had always been expressed in his writings, that the aim of **Queen Mab** — to "overset the whole system of things as they are" — was certainly unmistakable; that **The Revolt of Islam** and **Prometheus Unbound,** though "swathed in the golden mist of allegory," expressed the same design; and that, indeed, "the ruin of his larger poems has been, that his purpose is but too evident."††

It is possible that Shelley's detractors had had in mind the sort of orthodox dogmatic purpose which had characterized much poetry of the "Pleasures of Hope" and "Pleasures of Charity" type in the early century, and which was so easily attached by inference to the naturalistic beatitudes of Wordsworth. This is the more probable if, as we have suggested, the criticism of the times had derived a part of its standard from the earlier poets, precursors of Romanticism indeed, who glorified a beneficent God in passages of pastoral Nature verse. Gilfillan himself may have been slipping into the error when, to further his argument of Shelley's purposefulness, he characterized **The Cenci** as "full of purpose," and as "one of the most finished tragedies ever penned." Whether he was endowing the play with the moralistic ends so easily deduced from any such study of transcendent wickedness, or whether he found in it the ancient classical catharsis which was akin to Shelley's avowed aim, must remain an open question, inasmuch as Gilfillan refrained from stating just what he thought that aim and purpose was.

Two poems, indeed, **Alastor** and **Epipsychidion,** he regarded as devoid of purpose, or as having their unexplicit aims "buried in beauty."

In the matter of the subject of **The Cenci,** Gilfillan defended Shelley from the charge of a "ghoul-like gluttony of evil," and attested, if somewhat overemphatically, the delicacy of his treatment of the evil theme. But it was, perhaps, too much to say that the nature of the crime in question could hardly be guessed from the play, if there were no knowledge of the historical fact:

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* Pp. 77-76.
† See p. 78.
‡ Pp. 79-80.
** P. 80.
†† P. 80.

> The subject of "The Cenci," for instance, is almost too horrible for belief or allusion; and yet, so tenderly has he treated the theme, that, but for the known historical facts, you could not, with certainty, infer the nature of the crime which led to parricide. So far from dwelling with morbid avidity . . . upon the hideous subject, he throws a mystery around it; he represents it as something horrible, but nameless; no distinct finger-post points to its nature; its name never occurs; and the interest and power of the play are nearly independent of what is dark and disgusting in the theme.*

The reason for the choice of the subject was, in his opinion, what Shelley and Mary had suggested: the interest and appeal of the tragic character of Beatrice.

The final detraction to which Gilfillan made reply was the prevalent "absurd notion" that Shelley "was made for a translator" and should never have tried to be anything else. He conceded his greatness in this way of art, but properly regarded it as secondary to first-hand creation, for which Shelley was superlatively fitted.

> And was not Shelley better occupied when hymning the "Sky-Lark" — heaping sublime curses on the Keats-killer — describing the plague, in the "Revolt of Islam" — mating Milton in his "Ode to Liberty" — or treading within the shadow of Shakspere in "The Cenci" — than in gutting the Faust, or translating odes to Mercury, the god of commerce and of thieves?†

Dropping this negative attitude of defense, the critic turned to the striking general qualities of Shelley's poetry. His descriptions reflected in their own utterance the enthusiastic force of the works of which they were written. The intensity of that enthusiasm was his first text:

> The first thing which strikes his reader, is the air of enthusiasm which breathes around: you find yourself caught up, from the low level of life, into the atmosphere of mountain summits — a rarer, purer, prouder element. . . . Everything with him is in extremes. He has not joy, but rapture — not grief, but despair — not love, but agony — not courage, but martyrdom — not anger, but Pythian rage. His admiration of nature and of the great works of man, is a fine and noble delirium. The ardour which some poets affect, and which others can only sustain through short and occasional flights, is in him the mere motion of his mind. There is no resting, no dallying delay, no sleeping upon the wing, no looking round upon the spectators. It is an uninterrupted kindling flight as if for existence. A lyrical poet sustains with difficulty his maddening rapture through a flight of some fifty or a hundred lines, and at the close sinks exhausted and panting on the ground; but few, save Shelley, could support the transport of the ode, throughout twelve books of Spenserian verse. Here, indeed ,is the grand fault of his poetry. It is not a majestic walk, nor even a rapid race; it is a long and stormy dance, in which few can keep up with the exhilarated and transported bard.‡

The exuberant imagination which was the instrument of this peculiar rhapsody Gilfillan also characterized:

> You remark, too, in all his writings, the complete and despotic predominance of the imaginative power, as in all truly great poets, from Homer to Scott: you see that over all his faculties and attainments, over his intellect, his erudition, his pomp and profusion of language, the great light of genius holds sway, like the still sun compelling his planets to obedience by a principle inherent in their own natures. He combines imagination, fresh as that of childhood, and strong as that of madness, with the powers of a manly understanding and the accomplishments of finished scholarship. You are amazed at the quantity of his images. Like sparks from a conflagration, brilliant and thick amid the smoke of his mysticism, flashes out incessantly a stream, a storm, or whirlwind of images. . . . You notice, too, the unearthly character of his images. They are culled from the rarest, the loftiest, and the wildest scenes of Nature: from the grandest idealisms of Art; from the most secret and singular chambers of the human soul; from the foam of hidden cataracts; from the ravines of lonely mountains; from snows untouched by the foot of man; from the "hiss of homeless streams"; from the heart of sad and solitary woods; from the moan of midnight forests; from the "thousand harmonious sounds which nature creates in her solitudes"; from the thrones of the thunder and the mansions of the dead; from Rome with its flowery ruins and gigantic death-smiles of Art; from sculpture and from painting; from the dim philosophy of Plato, and the tragic furies and fervours of Eschylus. From all these he has gathered

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* P. 81.
† P. 83.
‡ Pp. 83-84.

colours which are not of the earth: flowers of "arrowy odour," and figures of colossal magnitude and magnificence.*

This was critical enthusiasm which, if one may make the distinction, seems to have resulted from the rationalized, conscious admiration of the wealth of poetic device and artistry made use of by the poet, rather than from a genuine participation, inspired (one knows not how) by the poet's words, in the exaltation out of which he wrote. It was admiration of the artist's art, rather than the creative record of an experienced kinship with the artist's mood. But, aside from the fact that the exposition of the qualities of poetry, and a clarification of the methods by which artistic aims have been achieved, are parts of the critic's work, this appreciation of Gilfillan's was an unmistakable record of a first-hand experience in Shelleyan rhapsody; and by reason of it, Shelley may be thought to have meant more than he had before to a few readers of the **Literary Portraits.** A single reader of such poetry as Shelley's is a lonely being; and the best criticism creates between its reader and its writer a comradeship upon vicarious heights.

Shelley's command of language and his poetic style, Gilfillan thought as magnificent and exuberant as his imagery:

> You notice, as aforesaid, his prodigious command of language. A "reluctant dragon" to many, it is an obedient vassal to him. Whatever he bids it do is done. Be it to beautify still more the lovely, or to aggravate the dreadful; to fix down the evanescent, or to decipher the dark; to express either the last refinement of sentiment or the utmost rapture of feeling; to paint homely horror or panic fear; beauteous dream or sad reality; scenes beyond the power of pencil, or such as a painter might copy in literal transcript — a rich, varied, unaffected, free, and powerful diction is equally and ever ready. His style reminds you of the "large utterance of the early gods." It is a giant speech, handed down from Plato to Dante, from Dante to Bacon, from Bacon to Milton, Jeremy Taylor, and John Howe; from these to Coleridge, Shelley, and Wordsworth. It is the "speech in which Spenser wrote his 'Faery Queen,' and Milton discoursed the Areopagitica to men, to angels, and to eternity." It is a speech of which we fear the type is failing among modern men.†

Of the related subject of the versification, Gilfillan added:

> His blank verse, without having Miltonic majesty, is elegance itself. His Spenserian stanza has not, except in parts, the mellifluous flow of Spenser, but it is less rugged and arbitrary than Byron's; and in energy, fire, and sweep of sound, leaves Beattie, Thomson, &c. far behind. But it is perhaps in his odes that his intensely lyrical genius has produced the principal wonders of sweet or stormy melody. They rise or fall, sink or swell, linger or hurry, lull to repose, or awaken to tempestuous excitement, lap or pierce the soul, at the perfect pleasure of the poet, who can "play well upon his instrument," be it pan, [?] pipe, or lyre; Jew's harp or organ, timbrel or trump.‡

Departing here from the description of the general qualities of Shelley's poetic technique and the methods by which he came at his effects, the essayist turned, with acknowledgment of its dangers as a critical method, to the comparison of Shelley to Keats and Coleridge, poets whom he thought to have had qualities more similar to those of Shelley than were any possessed by Byron. Against the coupling of Shelley with Byron, Gilfillan recorded here his protest, and proceeded straightway to contrast the two.

> The one was the personification of sublime hatred, the other of mystic love. The broad tree of Byron's genius, with its many manner of fruits, some sweet as grapes, and others sour as the star Wormwood, was rooted deep in the soil of black loamy selfishness: the vine of Shelley's mind grew out of a disinterested benevolence. The secret of Byron's power was his sullen and concentered passion, whereas sentiment was the soul of all the poetry of Shelley. . . . Both were sometimes called sublime maniacs; but while the madness of the one was the fruit of remorse and the restlessness of a diseased spirit, Shelley's mania was that of a mild and sensitive mind; the one was the frenzy of Timon, the other of Hamlet. As a popular and passionate poet, as a wit, satirist, and declaimer, if Byron have the advantage, Shelley has, in our judgment, as decided a superiority, both as a genuine enthusiast, and as a consummate artist, in originality of conception, and in dominion over the resources of language.**

But Keats and Coleridge Gilfillan thought more similar to Shelley than any of his

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* Pp. 84-85.
† Pp. 85-86.
‡ P. 86.
** P. 87.

other contemporaries. Of Keats, who he thought might with longer life have risen above Shelley, he wrote in this comparison:

> Both were men of trembling sensibility, and a genius almost feminine in its delicacy; both sinned in point of extravagance of imagery; both exhibited a promise which the most mature of their productions did not fulfill; both were essentially young poets; both, nevertheless, have left behind them imperishable monuments of their powers. . . . Shelley, by one bound, attained early a manliness of thought and diction which Keats never altogether reached. His genius was fed, besides, by a far wider erudition, and came forth shining in the hues of German and Grecian lore. . . . But if Keats could not have sustained the long enthusiasm of the "Revolt of Islam," nor have elaborated the masterful "Cenci," it lay alike out of the power of Shelley, or perhaps of any of the poets of the day, to produce Hyperion. . . .

And, in spite of the virtues possessed over him by Shelley —

> in sustained stateliness, in sounding march, in extent of knowledge, power of intellect, and purity of taste, and free as he is from his rival's babyism of manner, affectations of style, endless sinkings away from the finest eloquence, to the sheerest drivel —

Keats, had he lived, might, in Gilfillan's opinion, have "sat above Alastor."*

Including in the discussion matters of personal habit and appearance as well as literary traits, Gilfillan followed this with a similar treatment of Shelley and Coleridge:

> To Coleridge, Shelley bore a striking resemblance, in the wild and whirling movement of his mind, in the music of his verse, in the lyrical tone of his genius, in the pomp and power of his language, in the strange selection of his images, in the preternatural heat of his blood, in the diffusion and felt facility of his composition, and in that summer haze which swaddles so often the sun of his spirit. But in "energetic reason," in variety of knowledge, in mental comprehension, in gleams of sudden and searching truth, clearing away centuries of gloom; in incalculable unexpectedness, in single passages and figures, in occasional thoughts of extreme lustre, and in the might of a mysterious magic which floated about all the strange man did, from his most elaborate composition to his most careless table talk, Coleridge rises at once above him and all his countrymen. As a poet, however, Shelley has displayed more variety of fancy, and is altogether swifter, subtler, more daring, more eccentric and ethereal. . . .†

But on one point, said the essayist, there was no comparison: Coleridge was a Christian.

A sketch of Shelley's growth followed this, compounded of characterizations of the poems which marked his growth like milestones on the road of marching genius. Gilfillan condemned as utter and pernicious nonsense the whole substance of thought which **Queen Mab** was written to convey, but praised extravagantly the beauty of its opening and concluding lines.

> The middle part of that poem is, indeed, as bad as possible; full of insane trash against commerce, monarchy, &c. as dull as it is disgusting; but the first two hundred lines, descriptive of the sleep of Ianthe, and the ascent of the magic car, are equal, in sustained power, beauty, and refinement, to anything in the English language.

In writing of **The Revolt of Islam,** if he became again too minute a cataloguer of isolated qualities, Gilfillan did succeed in presenting his own experience of that poem in the light of an adventure in appreciation — an emotional reception of the poet's mood, qualified by a conscious intellectual perception of his method. Thus he combined the elements of appreciation and analysis, and again exemplified one of his most notable qualities as a critic.

> The melting music of the opening lines to Mary; the Spenser-like breadth and richness of its allegorical parts; its spiritual and ethereal tone; its raptures of natural description; the interest cast around the two lovers, who are its principal characters; the energy of its language; the strangeness of its story; the power of its individual pictures — such as that of the fight between the serpent and the eagle; the horrors of the plague, and the death of Laon and Laone; above all, the daring and dreamy representation of the future world, — in which, strange to tell, Shelley was a believer — all, taken together, produced on us a profound impression, and have rendered its perusal an interesting reminiscence in our intellectual history. We felt its occasional tediousness; the unsuitability of its stanza for narrative; the

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* Pp. 90-91.
† P. 91.

length and labour with which its allegories are spun out; the difficulty of keeping up such a high pitch of enthusiasm in its readers so long; its failure as an epic; and its impotence as an engine for the spread of opinion; but we had, nevertheless, the pleasing, yet solemn impression throughout, of being in the presence of a searching, original, and sublime genius.*

Rosalind and Helen was found "a more pathetic, but much less powerful production." The plot Gilfillan rehearsed.

> This slender stream of narrative the poet conducts through much green and fresh pathos, some homely tragedy, and some towering image. It is quite free from his besetting sin of allegory, and is altogether the most pleasing and lifelike of his minor poems.

Upon **Prometheus Unbound** a middle position was taken; a middle position was essential, we may observe, to praise of the art and condemnation of the message.

> Than the figure of Prometheus, and his opening soliloquy, and many of his after speeches, nothing can be more austere and antique: he is the very being whom the father of the Grecian stage had in his eye; mild, majestic, casting a loveliness from his meek face upon the rocks which hear his groans, and the vulture which drinks his blood; a being between man, demon, and deity, far different from the Satan of Milton, or the Lucifer of Byron; without the enormous pride of the one, or the lurid malignity of the other. The language, too, put into his mouth is quite worthy of him; free from the sulphurous foam of passion, "champing the bit," and from the writhing sneers of crushed malice; it is calm amid its misery, dignified in the very depths of its wo. In describing the scenery of the Caucasus, the silence, the air of eternity, the "bright and burning cold," the dizzy ravines, the snowy sheen, the loneliness and the shadowy might of that unspeakable mountain, are admirably caught in the abrupt and tortured grandeur of Shelley's blank verse: and there is one short scene, descriptive of the downfal [sic] of Jupiter . . . which reaches the acme of the sublime. . . . But the poem has great and incurable blemishes. It is utterly void of human interest. It is crushed under a load of thick allegorical darkness. As a catapult aimed at principalities and powers, it is feeble in its very hugeness, and "like a devilish engine back recoils." And even as a work of art it fails, from attempting too much. It is too like Eschylus to be equal to Eschylus. It reads, in part, like a translation from the Greek; and this is fatal to its success.†

Even **Adonais** Gilfillan found obscured by allegory: it was

> full of sweetness, sublimity, and pathos, but entangled with "wheel within wheel" of complicated allegory and thick-piled darkness.

But to this criticism he added a passage doing full justice to the portraits of the poem.

Without greatly extending his remarks on **The Cenci,** he rehearsed the dramatic elements of the plot, and chose for quotation the affecting last passage of the play, comparable to Lear's button in simple pathos, but a special object of ridicule by earlier critics:

> Here, mother, tie
> My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
> In any simple knot: ay, that does well,
> And yours, I see, is coming down. How often
> Have we done this for one another! now
> We shall not do it any more. My Lord,
> We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well.

> Meant for the first of a series, it stands alone, a colossal marble, the best of Shelley's productions; the first tragedy since Shakspere, and one of the first poems in this or any age.‡

Hellas was properly judged by Gilfillan as poem rather than as drama. He thought it full of "a rapid, torrent-like eloquence" — "a very Phlegethon."

> It is a wild prophetic impromptu, half white foam, and half red fire, lyrical withal, and only shadowed by the mystic shape of Ahasuerus; for here he takes a final farewell of the Wandering Jew, a figure which had haunted his genius all along from "Queen Mab" . . . down to his "positively last appearance" in "Hellas." What strange charm the idea had over Shelley's mind we cannot tell; unless, perhaps, a resemblance between his own des-

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* P. 94.
† Pp. 95-96.
‡ P. 99.

tiny and crime, and those of this fugitive and vagabond on the face of the earth.*

It was not characteristic of Gilfillan's kind of criticism that he should have omitted comment on the striking lyric passages of the poem; it was characteristic that he should have discussed the ominous biographical implications of Ahasuerus.

Of the lesser poems he made an eloquent summary:

> Shelley's smaller pieces are very various in style and merit, some of them most ingeniously and ineffably impenetrable, others as lovely and lively, or as soft and plaintive little morsels as ever dropt from human pen. Such, for instance, are the sweet and pure Anacreontic, beginning, "The fountains mingle with the river"; the "Lines to an Indian Air"; the "Lines written in dejection at Naples"; the "Hymn to a Skylark," which might be set to that blythest of birds' own music, and whose words dance like a fay in the silver shine of the moon; the "Sensitive Plant," the sweetest, strangest, dreamiest, holiest thing in all his poetry, with that lone figure of the nameless lady in it, glorifying her garden for evermore; the "Ode to Naples," mounting, as on storm wings of shadowy fire, into the very dome of the Temple of the Lyric Muse; the "Poem on the Aziloa," and her "sad cry"; the "Lines on the Euganean Hills," with their eloquent remonstrance to the "Swan of Albion," then soiling his desperate wing in the "sins and slaveries foul" of the sea-Sodom; the "Mont Blanc"; "Julian and Maddalo," with its fine portraiture of Byron and himself in the undress of their Titanic souls, "rolling billiard balls about," instead of pointing their batteries against the wide-mouthed artillery of Heaven; and lastly, "Peter Bell the Third," which, published since his death, has discovered an undercurrent of burning sarcasm to have run on in secret under the lake of his genius.†

Shelley's prose writings he interpreted as favorable to one's impression of Shelley the man; he was surprised to find them free of the fire of his poetry, and thoughtful; the prefaces, though somewhat too provocative and defiant, he deemed stately and trumpet-like and profound of criticism. We have seen that throughout the study he gave Shelley credit for much power of mind; the judgment was reiterated here. The briefest of biographical sketches closed the essay; the vengeance of the sea was tenderly passed over; "Let us shut the book, and clasp the clasp."

In his "Portrait" of Shelley, Gilfillan thus made use of four distinct methods of discussion. His first method was chiefly negative — a defense of Shelley against certain current objections to his verse. Here the poet was defended against the charges that he was a melancholy plaintiff against misfortune, that his poetry was absurdly and unnecessarily obscure, that it was lacking in purpose and direction, and that the talent of its author was better suited for translation than for creation. To each of these Gilfillan made effective, sometimes over-effective, reply; his best answer was to the charge of obscurity, which quality he defined, analysed, and judged in such a way as at once to propound the law of fidelity to the author's spirit and to characterize the medium in which that spirit came to its expression.

His second method consisted in describing with almost lyrical eloquence Shelley's enthusiasm and general poetic excellencies; in this his criticism became almost a poetic reconstruction of the Shelleyan rhapsody, and approached that recording of authentic adventure in the poet's world which we have characterized as the climax of critical achievement. The technique of this critical mode, which was not unlike the later transcendent description by Francis Thompson, combined with appreciative emotion a conscious analysis of the devices and sources of the inspiring beauty, and thus blended the intellectual with the emotional response.

The third method was that of comparison. Shelley was contrasted with Byron and compared with Keats and Coleridge; but the critic's procedure consisted only in an enumeration of points of likeness and dissimilarity, and did not provide the clear illumination of one poet by the other which such concrete analogy should afford.

The fourth method consisted in a sketch, poem by poem, of Shelley's growth in the art, but it offered little organized comment, either analytical or appreciative, of the individual works. Brief evaluations of the principal poems were about all that it achieved, in spite of its frequent combinations of the aesthetic with the dissective technique. Nor were the judgments upon the separate poems always wise; the lyrics received their due, **The Cenci** was exalted, but the lyricism of **Queen Mab** was overpraised, the **Prometheus** was thought Aeschylean, and the obscurity of **Adonais** was exaggerated. Gilfillan thus shared with Lewes the merit of employing the methods and attitudes of the most fruitful appreciation, and the fault of frequent error in specific judgment.

In "Prometheus Bound and Unbound," included in his **Third Gallery of Literary Portraits** (1854), Gilfillan added to his review of Professor Blackie's translation from AEschylus a few later and presumably matured observations on Shelley. He characterized the poet as one who had understood his own power, had dared greatly by reason of a premonition that his life would be short, but had left works marked by a morbid weakness due to physical suffering and "the insulated position into which his melancholy creed had thrown him."

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* Pp. 99-100.
† Pp. 100-101.

> He was a hero in a deep decline. Tall, swift, and subtle, he wanted body, sinews, and blood. His genius resembled a fine voice cracked. The only thoroughly manly and powerful things he has written are some parts of the "Revolt of Islam," the "Cenci" as a whole, and the commencement and one or two passages throughout the "Prometheus." The rest of his writings — even when beautiful as they generally are, and sincere, as they are always — are more or less fantastical and diseased. The "Cenci" itself, the most calm and artistic of his works, could never have been selected as a subject by a healthy or perfectly sane mind.*

The **Prometheus,** "most ambitious of his poems," Gilfillan thought had been written too fast, in too intoxicated a state, and twenty years too soon. He called it "a strong and beautiful disease"; he thought its imagery too wild and its style too wordy, and found in it deficiencies in "depth of sentiment," unity, simplicity, and the "human interest" of AEschylus.

He expressed, however, great admiration for parts of the **Prometheus** and for the potentialities of Shelley's genius.

> Beauties, of course, of a rare order it possesses. The opening speech of Prometheus — his conversation with the earth — the picture of the Hours — one or two of the choruses — and, above all, the description of the effects of the "many-folded shell," in regenerating the world, are worthy of any poet or pen; and the whole, in its wasted strength, mixed with beautiful weakness, resembling a forest struck with premature autumn, fills us with deep regrets that his life had not been spared. Had he, twenty years later, a healthier, happier and better man, "clothed and in his right mind," approached the sublime subject of the "Prometheus," no poet, save Milton and Keats, was ever likely to have so fully completed the AEschylean design.

As for Shelley's philosophy, the concluding judgment of Gilfillan was that it seemed "hopeless," inasmuch as it expected human regeneration without divine intervention.

Scottish orthodoxy and open-minded conservatism could say no more.

Probably because of a desire to oblige George Gilfillan and the publisher, Tait, Thomas De Quincey wrote "Notes" upon five of the "Portraits" issued in Gilfillan's first volume. These "Notes" were published in **Tait's Edinburgh Magazine** for November and December, 1845, and January and April, 1846. The "Notes" on Shelley and Keats were included by their author in his Collective edition of 1857, and thus his most interesting study of Shelley became a part of both periodical and permanent literature.

The essay on Shelley, while it contained very little of what may be called legitimate criticism, offered a sympathetic study of the dark and bright sides of its subject's character. Shelley's offenses against received morality and the Christian faith seemed hard to be forgiven by a traditionally reverent world, but for De Quincey they were mitigated by the poet's known sincerity, essential goodness, and pity for the evil lot of men. As De Quincey traced the life of Shelley, so far as it was known to him, and the development of the atheistical tendencies, the tragic aspect of that bright career seemed to touch his heart. His argument throughout was **a priori,** from Shelley's character; because of the poet's constancy of purpose, consistent sincerity, and brotherly sympathy, De Quincey could not believe with Gilfillan either that Shelley might have been converted from his course or that he actually requested the use of Surrey chapel, as the anecdote told, for the blasphemous purpose of preaching infidelity. He represented Shelley as having been infidel in mind but Christian at heart.

Except for casual mention of **Adonais,** references to the poems were limited to **Queen Mab** and **The Cenci**; and these comments were related to the biographical theme. **Queen Mab** was presented as one of Shelley's chief "affronts to the Founder of Christianity," inasmuch as it affirmed the existence of a monstrous God, and capped its climax with the execution of a malicious Christ. De Quincey was aware that the "atrocious picture of the Deity" had been put into the mouth of the Wandering Jew, but he was certain that Ahasuerus represented the voice of the poet himself, and that not even the mitigation of youth could be advanced in Shelley's behalf, since he had then matured into an intellectual atheism devoted to the causes of defiance and hatred.

By a similar use of the biographical method, in this case under the conviction of Shelley's purity and idealism, De Quincey agreed with Gilfillan

> in protesting against the thoughtless assertion of some writer in **The Edinburgh Review** — that Shelley at all selected the story of his 'Cenci' on account of its horrors, or that he has found pleasure in dwelling on those horrors. So far from it, he has retreated so entirely from the most shocking feature of the story, viz., the incestuous violence of Cenci the father, as actually to leave it doubtful whether the murder were in punishment of the last outrage committed, or in repulsion of a menace continually repeated. The true motive of the selection of such a story was — not its darkness, but (as Mr. Gilfillan, with so much penetration, perceives) the

* **A Third Gallery of Literary Portraits,** New York, 1855.

light which fights with the darkness: Shelley found the whole attraction of this dreadful tale in the angelic nature of Beatrice, as revealed in the portrait of her by Guido. . . . Even the murder, even the parricide, though proceeding from herself, do but deepen that background of darkness, which throws into fuller revelation the glory of that suffering face immortalized by Guido.*

This belief in the essential nobility of Shelley's character led De Quincey, while he did not believe that so constant a man could have been converted, to the conclusion that no man's gifts of temperament and mind would have been better suited to the highest Christian faith.

> No man was better qualified to have loved Christianity; and to no man, resting under the shadow of that one darkness, would Christianity have said more gladly — **talis cum sis, utinam noster esses!** Shelley would, from his earliest manhood, have sacrificed all that he possessed to any comprehensive purpose of good for the race of man.†

De Quincey's "Note" was thus a personal or informal essay, of orthodox and somewhat sentimental tone, on the nobility of Shelley's character and the unfortunate perversion of his views. As a serious essay of wholesome and conservative content, written by an established man of letters, it must have been good magazine material. It interests us in De Quincey; but, both because it is avowedly supplementary to another man's work and because it offers no criticism beyond the casual appeal to fragments of biography, it can interest us little in Shelley. At best it was merely a personal tribute, and a scarcely necessary plea for the benevolent interpretation of biographical fact.‡

This reaction in favor of the personal Shelley was echoed in a volume of **Pen and Ink Sketches of Poets, Preachers, and Politicians,** published anonymously in London in 1846.** The author had been an eye-witness of Shelley's anger against an inhospitable householder who had refused help for a woman the poet had rescued; and the parallelism between Shelley's desire to introduce a strange woman into a trusting homestead and his wish to introduce suspicious reforms into English society had furnished an excellent ecclesiastical analogy. Shelley was pronounced more nearly Christian, however, than the publications which had abused him. In keeping with the current tendency toward ingenious analogy, the author put Shelley with Byron, Southey, and Coleridge as one of the poets who had failed in the quest for the happy and perfect man; he thought that, by reason of his failure, Shelley had

> transferred to futurity his dream of perfectibility in human nature, and laying his hand on Revelation as the only hold left to him, the sole refuge of that hope of perpetuated being, perhaps natural to man, grew jealous of even [sic] imaginary slight offered to that ark of his eternal salvation.

This was to represent Shelley's career as a search for his own personal salvation, and to neglect the philanthropic element in him for a mistaken emphasis upon the personal motive.

In the following year reviews of Medwin's biography and the other Shelley books began to appear anew, and few of these notices were limited to the publications in question. The scholarly **Athenaeum,** among other critics of Medwin, was inclined to believe that, because it had been favorably received by most reviewers, the new biographer was wrong in describing **The Cenci** as a work which had "turned his mind from the bent of its natural inclinations." And yet, as we have seen, Medwin was right on the point. The **Athenaeum** was also ready to sink the poet's errors in his reassuring sincerity, and to blame his aberration, in part, upon the movement of which he was said to have been a member.

> Posterity . . . will do justice to his claims both as a logician and a poet — as a sincere votary of Truth and of Beauty. He will yet be justly subject, in both characters, to the charge of having hastily assumed his leading proposition. But what amount of error may be attributed to him in this respect is more than compensated by the indisputable honesty of his convictions — the unworldliness of his conduct — the purity of his life — and the superiority of his talents and genius. As a poet he closes (as we have said) a cycle to which rather than to himself belong most of the faults for which he has been reprehended.††

The notice of Medwin's book in the **Eclectic Review** was also given in part to a

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* **The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey,** edited by David Masson, London, 1897, Vol. XI, p. 376.

† Ibid., p. 375.

‡ See also Dowden's reference (**Life of Shelley,** II, 302n.) to De Quincey's favorable judgment of **The Revolt of Islam** in a letter to Wilson.

** Attributed by Anderson in his British Museum bibliography (Sharp's **Life of Shelley**) to "John Ross?" or "John Dix?"

†† **Athenaeum** for September, 1847, p. 1004.

description of the spirit and troubled thought of this age which had modified the poet for its own ends.

> In all the fields of science and literature, the selfish philosophies of Hobbes, Voltaire, and Bentham, seemed to be victorious over Christianity. In the endowed churches, the teaching of Christianity was a professional formality. In many of the voluntary churches, a tone of philosophy prevailed which accorded the gospel to the moralities of the schools. The right of private judgment had been pushed into a habit of universal doubt. Men believing only in their reason, ended at last in doubting even that. Doubt became the element in which all literary and philosophical minds lived. . . . He [Shelley] found himself beset with the doubt of doubt. His purgatory was a doubt of faith, and a disbelief of unbelief.

This was true to the extent that Shelley had finally worked out for himself a position which denied both the materialism to which he had earlier adhered and the ordinary conception of faith which he regarded as a part of a debased religion. But the reviewer could hardly credit him with a complex philosophy while denying him the attribute of an incisive and comprehensive mind:

> Endowed with a fine imagination and a generous disposition, Shelley had but an ordinary share of intellect. It is true he died before he reached the age of thirty, but at the best of his intellect he never displayed any capacity for metaphysical studies. . . . Nothing but persecution could have enabled the weakest of metaphysical and sceptical cobwebries to keep possession of his reason. . .*

This was most execrably misleading; the reviewer should have supplemented his doubtful acquaintance with Shelley by reading some of his prose. It was the very presence in the poet of an uncommon ability, as well as an uncommon liking, for metaphysics which had rendered his thought and imagery thus alien to the conventional and merely logical concept of spiritual truth.

In the preceding year a review of several Shelley books in the **North British Review** had dealt generously with the excellencies of Shelley's art, but segregated all his highest achievements from his didactic leanings and intentions. **Alastor** had been thought by the reviewer in some ways his finest poem, but the palm accorded, as usual, to **The Cenci.**

> **Alaster** [sic] is a poem beautifully conceived, and beautifully executed. Of Shelley's poems, it alone is free from the disturbing influences of the war with society in which he had so early and so madly engaged. . . . Physical suffering is the hot-bed of genius; and the strange circumstances of his life were calculated to make Shelley look inward on his own nature and being. In the language there is not, as far as we know, a strain of melancholy sustained throughout at the same elevation. . . . Alaster is in all respects superior to Queen Mab, Shelley's earliest poem. The vicious structure of society is the subject of Queen Mab — and all its evils are presented to the imagination as if they could be at once removed by strong exertion of the will. . . . Shelley's self-deception arises from his contemplating man's nature as it is in self, as it existed in Paradise anterior to the existence of society — and from this drawing inferences that can have no application to the artificial state of existence which we, and our parents, and our children, are born into. . . . Shelley is almost inspired when he holds communion with his own mind alone and reveals its movements. His fantasies, when they would stretch at all beyond that which ought to have been "the haunt and main region of his song," are mere dreams, and ought to be remembered and forgotten as such.†

This was not merely to disapprove of didactic and purposeful poetry, but to neglect it in the evaluation of a poet among whose works it formed the chief and most characteristic part. The method could have been justified only by limiting the essay to a study of the poet's art for its own sake; but it was really an attempt to deal with Shelley and his poems in a broad and inclusive fashion.

His language was accorded the highest praise, and his power of intellect was acclaimed as surpassing even the superlative instrument of its expression:

> The exceeding subtlety of his thoughts was such as to demand every aid that words could give, and the result was a power of language such as no English poet has ever before attained. This, had Shelley lived, would probably have made him our greatest poet, for there is no one of his poems that gives in any degree an adequate measure of his intellectual power. We feel of him as if he had created a language, in which he did not live long enough to have written anything.‡

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* **Eclectic Review,** Fourth Series, XXIII, 1848, pp. 150 and 165.

† Reprinted in the **Eclectic Magazine** for Jan., 1848 (Vol. 13), from the **North British Review.** Quoted from the **Eclectic Magazine,** pp. 15-17.

‡ Ibid., p. 19.

The Cenci was called the highest attainment of a genius in the development of which the earlier poems were scarcely more than schoolboy exercises. The "handling of the myth" in **Prometheus** was thought "superior to anything in Aeschylus or Goethe." **Adonais,** while it seemed to afford the truest picture of the author's mind, was thought not as well suited to the general reader as **The Cenci** or **Prometheus** because it lacked the dramatic form which should assist the reader into his "imagined position." The dramatic form, however, is of no patent assistance in rendering the **Prometheus** easy reading; and the opinion that **Adonais** had fewer of the qualities that make for popular appeal than **Prometheus** convicts the essayist of having struggled rather desperately for something impressive to say. This pedantic straining after a seeming accuracy led further, into such statements as that in his poems of "dream and mysticism," such as **The Witch of Atlas** and **Epipsychidion,** "he exhibits more thoughtful appreciation of the powers of language than **is apparent** in his greater works"; and the assertion that from the morbid element in these fantasies "his strong good sense — the distinguishing attribute of his mind as proved in all his later letters — would have undoubtedly rescued him." Finally, his Homer's **Hymn to Mercury** was described as the "best translation in the language."

This sort of discourse was typical of much criticism in the period after the incendiary fires of Shelley had died away and men had turned to striving for a proud philosophical accuracy in describing his art and character. For the uninspired or ungifted critic, the result was often farthing prose such as this — pedestrian monologue dignified by a laborious and spurious logic, expressing its academic enthusiasm chiefly in broad apothegms about poetic merit, and its mental judgments in language too far qualified by caution for any true precision.

In 1849 the **Prospective Review, a Quarterly Journal of Theology and Religion,** contained an analysis of Shelley's theology and a generalized sketch of the spiritual aspect of his poetry. Its emphasis was upon his separation of the principles of Love and Power, which in orthodox Christian dogma were united, and the remoteness of his work both from contemporary influence and from the presentation of an accepted celestial, terrestrial, or infernal world. He was thought to have lacked the necessary stabilizing principle of "Religion," with its effects of restraint and calmness of spirit.

> His sorrow was, that he could not attain to the conception of a great Disposer in whom to trust. He had contrived to separate the ideas of Love and Power; to set the idea of Beneficence in opposition to that of the Supreme Force; to conceive of Love as waging eternal war with Sovereign Might; he delighted chiefly in the conception of a tyrannic Almightiness and an insurgent Philanthropy. To the setting forth of this anarchic Theology he devoted his genius. His works are the gradual glorification of it. . . . **Prometheus Unbound** is the master utterance of this strange Theology.*

The similarities between Christ and Shelley's Prometheus were not such as to indicate that Shelley had used the Christian conception of a Redeemer of the race:

> The principle from which flowed the life of Christ stands in direct antagonism to the idea which inspired the fable of Prometheus. Jesus came to man from God; Prometheus rises up for man in defiance of Jove. . . . The Savior united the uttermost of love and self-sacrifice for man, with the uttermost of love and obedience to God; Prometheus combined all conceivable tenderness and self-immolation for those beneath him, with all imaginable hate and disobedience towards Him above him.†

Shelley's opposition of the Good and Evil principles did not, of course, render it necessarily true that he had identified the tyrannic power precisely with the Christian concept of God; he certainly had not identified it with the great Spirit or Power which he knew as the indwelling soul of the universe, who moves with his breath "our silent chords at will." In so far as the tyrannical was made one in his mind with the abuses of organized religion, he had attacked the Christianity he knew in the physical life; but God was not his Tyranny. On the other hand, a more liberal conception by the critic of the **human** side of Christ, and a less suspicious interpretation of the allegorical entity of Jove, might have shown in **Prometheus Unbound** an unexpectedly close analogy to the story of the ministry of Christ.

The cosmic drama of Prometheus was judged to be "the only truly great and sublime continuation of another's thought that we know of"; but Shelley's poetry was interpreted as having otherwise almost no connection with the past.

> He is sovereignly, sadly, awfully original — in our mind, the most original of all bards. No poems of any age seem to us such pure outpourings of the poet's own, so entirely drawn from himself, from his inmost soul, less built upon experience, more independent on history, less tinged with the colour of the age, the hue of contemporary thought. The stream of his genius flowed on lonely and melancholy, with scarcely a tributary, swollen by none of the neighbour rivers, fed only by the far-off waters of the Greek tragedy and the Platonic Philosophy.‡

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* **Prospective Review,** 1849, Vol. V. P. 79.
† Ibid., p. 80.
‡ Ibid., p. 81.

In addition to this absence of historical and contemporary influences, there was noted in his poetry a peculiar remoteness both from the life of the known earth and from the current conceptions of celestial and infernal futurity.

> There resides in his strains no bliss celestial, no comfort terrestrial, no malignity infernal; he brings with him neither airs from Heaven nor blasts from Hell, nor fresh breezes from mother earth; but strange gales from some bright, fair, far-off, beautiful, yet mournful Spirit-land.*

A man of so intensely spiritual a nature was a lamentable loss to the world of orthodox religious vision and thought, and so to be acknowledged and bewailed.

> Shelley was the most spiritual of all poets; one who drew most entirely from his own soul, dwelt almost wholly with thoughts, and but slightly with things; who gathered least inspiration from objects around and most from ideas, cast himself most utterly away from earth and its business, from man and his passions, to plunge into the depths of Being . . . made so much of the things of the spirit as to reverse the old poetic wont and illustrate the Actual by the Spiritual, instead of employing the Actual as an illustration of the Ideal.†

It was therefore the shame of Christianity that it had not held and inspired this man, as it was the vindication of Christianity that his life had come to tragedy without it.

The statements of this critic were often literally true, but his implications were as often false and misleading. Shelley had been chiefly free from purely literary influences, especially from his contemporaries, but his mind had been almost wholly made and vitalized by the general influences of Literature and Philosophy. This freedom from important literary debt (in spite of what might be said of Godwin, Southey, Wordsworth, the Elizabethans, Aeschylus, and Calderon) might have been more profitably presented by saying that he was of no school, the immediate descendent of no direct literary tradition; and that he was especially at odds with the tendencies which immediately preceded him.

His poetry did frequently represent a world alien both to experience and to conventional concept; the cause of this lay not in the legend of his visionary life nor in the legend of his lack of practical capacity, but in the facts of a conscious and purposeful theory of poetry which excluded ordinary pragmatic ends, and of an imagination subject to flights of fancy which led it beyond mere reproduction of concrete experience. The contacts of his poetry with the real world lay not in its technique and material so much as in its motivation from social sympathies; it was consciously directed at the expression of ideal truth, and thus at eventual practical good; and with conventional conceptions of heaven and hell it had nothing to do.

In 1849 the **Edinburgh Review** combined with a detailed discussion of Tennyson's **The Princess** an essay on the two supplementary phases of poetry designated "national" and "ideal." Aspiration and earthly delight were pronounced the twin motives of creative art; and the two schools of poets were seen as rising out of these respective motives.

> From this double power arise two converse schools of poetry; the one characterised by its plastic power and its function of embodying the abstractedly great and the ideally beautiful; the other by its reality, its homebred sympathies, its affinities with national history, character, and manners.‡

The national poetry was further described as that which interpreted the English mind and found its inspiration in an English setting; the ideal was that which arose from classical origins and the culture of southern Europe, and built upon these a peculiar world of the spirit. Shakespeare and Chaucer were in this sense chiefly national poets; Burns was intensely national; Milton, for all his building of the Puritan temple of epic verse, was ideal. Among the greater Romanticists, Wordsworth and Coleridge, by reason of their interpretation of the English mind, were chiefly national; Keats and Shelley, pronouncedly ideal. It was in this connection that Shelley was introduced into the essay.

Shelley was said to have been classical chiefly in temperament; the abstraction of his intellect and the figurative, rather than plastic, quality of his imagination were thought unlike the sensuous Greek poetry. His emphasis upon thought for its own sake, or for the sake of truth, was also to be counted as unclassical. Of Shelley's imagination the essayist wrote:

> In place of moulding the subject of a poem as a whole, it scattered itself abroad in the splendour of countless metaphors, seen sometimes one through another, like a taper discerned through a taper. A beautiful image had for him an attraction independently of the thought with which it was allied; and once brought within the sphere of its attraction, his fancy fluttered around it, bewildered and intoxicated. A thought had for him also a value

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* Ibid., p. 82.
† Ibid., pp. 82-83.
‡ **Edinburgh Review**, Oct., 1849, Vol. 90 (American edition), p. 215.

irrespectively of the place which it held in his argument; he prized it as truth; he prized it yet more as knowledge; and with such thoughts his poetry, at once subtly and expansively intellectual, is charged to a degree almost unprecedented.*

It is interesting that the reviewer thought a discussion of Shelley's principles out of place in the consideration of his poetry. The ideas of the poet were characterized, without specification, as erroneous, but in this case it was observed that his errors were certainly no worse than many coming into print in the middle century. The infallible logic was remarked by which Shelley's conclusions were derived from his moral premises of incidental evil; and the essayist turned back to the poetry, and especially to the poet's command of language.

> Its abstruse as well as imaginative character would have rendered it almost unintelligible, if he had not possessed, though apparently by nature rather than by study, a singular gift of language. His diction, which was searching, vigorous, various, arranged itself into periods, scholastic in the skill that joined clause on to clause, and the sustained melody of which at once discriminated the meaning and enforced the sentiment . The same dialectical precision gave dignity to his style, whether he wrote in verse or in prose; and imparted to both the utmost clearness which the subject matter, the involved thought, and the redundant imagery allowed of. This faculty was eminently Grecian; and the very sound of that noble language, which was not so much a study to him as a delight, will often be found in his verse. He reminds us of the Greek inspiration chiefly by the skill with which he illustrated the ancient mythology. In his 'Prometheus Unbound,' his classical vein is too often checked by political or metaphysical disquisitions most inappropriately introduced; but in it, and in the chorusses of his 'Hellas,' there is an Aeschilean energy; and many of the classical touches in his 'Adonais' are admirably true. It is, however, in his minor poems that he most belongs to the South. His 'Hymn of Apollo' and 'Hymn of Pan' are full of the musical hilarity of the Greeks; his 'Ode to Naples' is a true ode of compact structure and concentrated purpose; and his 'Arethusa,' the metre of which sweeps along like a vernal torrent, and in which the nymph and the element she presides over are with such skill blended and alternated, proves that Shelley's versatile temperament included that Protean power by which the Greeks dramatised Nature and humanised all her forms.†

In connection with the observation that poetry was the native utterance of such a temperament and such a character as Shelley's, the dogmatism of that character was justly and skillfully described.

> His poetry, in truth, is the embodiment of a social creed, not only dogmatic and exclusive but aggressive. His song is no voice from Nature's recesses, sent forth to indicate the whereabouts of sweet and secret passion; still less is it the orderly array of thought with which the ambitious scholar studiously adorns his theme and commends his name to posterity. It is the chaunt of the bard, or rather the war-note of the prophet-chief. In the solitudes of the soul, and when most 'hidden in the light of thought,' Shelley was a public man — bent on political designs, such designs as even now convulse the world. His spirit did not, indeed, like Milton's 'sit in the pomp of singing robes,' but to use his own expression, 'hovered in verse o'er his accustomed prey.'†

Of the moral and intellectual wrongs which this poetic dogmatism contained and propagated, it was judged that error rather than perversion had been the cause; but it was also held that this error had emasculated much of Shelley's work. The attitude of the critic stood clearly forth: the mistakes of the poet were no longer such as required to be actively combatted — for Victorian England they were admittedly wrong; and all that remained was to pass broad-minded and philosophic judgment upon the surviving poetical virtues of their author. There was no hostile spirit manifest, nor any admission of room for debate upon the point of morals. But Shelley's character was shown in pure nobility, as if uncontaminated by mere errors of will and imagination.

> He taught when he had but begun to think, and before he had begun to learn; and the perverse error which blinded his eyes was a snare also to his feet, and made void one half of the work of his hands. Seldom have such gifts been so abused. He was strong in zeal, but weak through self-confidence: he rushed into the fight without armour, though with boundless courage; and with the weapon of an idle and ignorant scorn he struck, not only at abuses and corruptions, which such as he are sent to plague and to destroy, but at truths older than either science or song, and higher than his highest hopes for man. . . . One of the lessons which we have to learn from

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* Ibid., p. 220.
† Ibid., p. 221.

> Shelley is the insufficiency of the highest moral aspirations alone to guard us against lurking evil in our spiritual nature; and especially against that of pride — the root of infidelity, and the weakness that borders most nearly on insanity.*

The poems chosen for special mention were such as to indicate that Shelley was still being held in esteem chiefly for his inspired lyrics.

> There is not one of his larger works which is not a storehouse of condensed thought and beauty — whatever may be its faults in the way of unreality or exaggeration. His 'Hymn on Intellectual Beauty,' his odes to 'Liberty,' to 'Naples,' to 'the West Wind,' his 'Cloud,' his 'Skylark' and many a choral ode in his Lyrical Dramas, are in themselves a conclusive answer to a charge frequently brought against English poetry, namely, that it has seldom soared into the highest region of lyrical inspiration: and in his shorter pieces there are numerous snatches of song to which the term 'essential poetry' would not be misapplied, — poems not only of magnetic power, but as flawless as the diamond, and in their minuteness as perfect as the berry on the tree or the bubble on the fountain. Great indeed is the bequest which Shelley has left us; and it is not without somewhat of remorseful sorrow that we remember what life gave him in return.†

The discussion of Shelley concluded with the sentimental retrospect over his sad career so common with the mid-Victorian critics. But the conclusion was preceded by a recapitulation of those qualities of art and temperament which were most commonly regarded as his defects. It was said that he had had notable capacity for that exalted wonder which begets poetry, but that he had lacked veneration and the power of suspending judgment. His mind, regarded by preceding writers as deficient in the truly mental attributes, was represented as keen and powerful, but narrow. His work was said to lack the sanity which marks the creations of the greatest masters; it was thought to have been concerned a bit too introspectively with the author's self. Apology was made for some of these defects by reference to the poet's lack of the discipline of experience, and to other mitigating circumstances. We may observe that Shelley did possess in superlative degree the capacity for the admiration of beauty and that his lack of veneration chiefly concerned only those institutions and ideas which were, justly or not, conventionally venerable. His mind was broader and his human experience greater than would be evident to one who examined only his poetry for knowledge of the man. As for the other defects, they were such as did injure his art; but they were also essential to the Shelleyan quality. Without them Shelley could no more have been Shelley than he could have been himself without that sometimes undiscriminating moral fire by the elimination of which the earlier reviewers had thought that his art might have been improved.

The method of the essay was founded upon definitions of the two supplementary schools of poetry, and the discussion of Shelley was professedly unified by its connection with one of these schools. His assignment to the "ideal" school was in itself a partial clarification of the nature of his peculiar art; the relation of his work to the Grecian genius provided a fresh point of view. The description of his poetry as bard-like in its inspiration and vital in its message constituted a truthful tribute; the condemnation of his attack upon traditionally revered institutions was in a measure justified by the Victorian custom of separating matter of doctrine from matter of art. Shelley's art was receiving more and more detailed attention; his message, less than in the earlier years.

The Ernulphic vigor of the Edinburgh **Hogg's Instructor**, comparable to the best of Regency anathema on the subject, provided what must now seem a comic interval in the placid course of mid-century Shelley scholarship. The style of its essay on "Shelley and Cowper" may be adequately sampled in two sentences of the Dissenter-pulpit declamation by which a now unknown Caledonian divine sought to preserve the sanctity of the Scottish hearth and home:

> We rise from the perusal of Shelley's poems with a sensation of terror. The spell of a fearful enchanter has been around us — ghostly shapes have glared upon us — we have floated upon a midnight sea of gathered iniquities — we have strode amidst the hoarded crimes of ages — we have sat at a feast of spectres, whose fleshless limbs and chapless skulls, the purpled robe and jewelled tiara of poetry could not conceal — we have revelled with demons dancing to the music of human groans — we have sailed down a steep and roaring torrent of triumphant vice, banked and bordered with the richest gems and rarest flowers of poetry; but amidst the glorious umbrage, the green and golden foliage, the shriek of violated innocence is heard, the fiery scowl of lust is seen, and the dark red hand of murder waters its verdure with the blood of hecatombs of victims; we have slept on the floor of a magnificent temple, and in our dreams the faith of our fathers and our own has been cast away, the holiest rites derided, the most hallowed and sacred things profaned; discord mingles with harmony, confusion with order, and hirsute deformity with symmetrical beauty —

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* Ibid., p. 221.
† Ibid., p. 222.

'Whilst Hope's fair brow grows dark with treach'ry's scowl,
And pity sings the anthem of despair,
And mercy turn'd to vengeance seems to howl
The 'hest of slaughter from the 'place of prayer.'*

Cowper, thank Heaven, had perpetrated no such villainy!

Of a different nature from that of the purely aesthetic essays was the account given of Shelley by George Brimley in his study of "Wordsworth's Poems" in **Fraser's** for 1851.† His method dealt with tendencies in poetry in terms of "representative men"; Shelley was

> the poetical representative of those whose hopes and aspirations, and affections rush forward to embrace the great Hereafter, and dwell in rapturous anticipation on the coming of the golden year, the reign of universal freedom, and the establishment of universal brotherhood.‡

The forces that entered into the making of this prophet of the new Augustan time signified also significant elements of contemporary thought:

> The feelings of poignant anguish and bitter indignation, which had been roused in him by cruelty and injustice towards himself, coloured all his views of society, and at once sharpened his hostility to the civil and religious institutions of his country, and lent more glowing colours to the rainbow of promise that beamed upon him from the distance, through the storm of bloodshed and revolution. Add to this, that his mind was ill-trained, and not well furnished with facts; that he could draw from form, colour, and sound, a voluptuous enjoyment, keener and more intense than the grosser animal sensations of ordinary men; that his intellect hungered and thirsted after absolute truth, after central being, after a living personal unity of all things. Thus he united in himself many of the mightiest tendencies of our time, its democratic, its sceptical, its pantheistic, its socialistic spirit; and thus he has become the darling and the watchword of those who aim at reconstructing society, in its forms, in its principles, and in its beliefs, — who regard the past as an unmitigated failure, as an entire mistake; who would welcome the deluge for the sake of the new world that would rise after the subsidence of the waters.**

The immortal residue of this philosophic chaos of the century would be, in Shelley's case, a heritage of song from which its inspiriting message-content would be stripped away as an impediment to beauty. Shakespeare had been England's only "more glorious poet."

> After the passions and the theories which supplied Shelley with the subject-matter of his poems have died away and become mere matters of history, there will still remain a song, such as mortal man never sung before, of inarticulate rapture and of freezing pain, — of a blinding light of truth and a dazzling weight of glory, translated into English speech, as coloured by a painted window, as suggestive, as penetrating, as intense as music.††

Brimley's criticism of Shelley was a sort of suggestive summarizing, a final statement of residual values, rather than an aggregation of specific and enumerative comments. It made intelligent use of the clarifying agency of time; its attitude was at the same time historical and intimate. Its literary quality, marked as it was by the meticulous parallelisms, mixed metaphors, and conventional eloquence of the period, was far superior to that of most of its companion-pieces in the Shelley commentary. So far as pertained to its generalizing method, it limited itself neither to the artist or the propagandist; but, judging the poet in terms of both supplementary sides of his being, set clearly forth the relationship they bore, and were to bear, to one another. It was pregnant with a suggestive quality which centers the reading mind even today upon the remembered qualities of both the poet and his troublous period. Finally, its method was not unlike the biographical method in the art of history, of which Carlyle spoke, which made the man the touchstone of his time and the period a foil for his individual luster.

Scottish philosophy was at this period apparently too empirical a science to sympathize with Shelley's transcendentalism. In one of his lectures before the Edinburgh Philosophical Association, D. M. Moir wrote of the poet with plain and level-headed common sense. With Shelley Barry Cornwall was introduced, who "chose the flowery valleys of fancy and feeling," whereas Shelley "took the bare uplands of imaginative philosophy." Of **Alastor,** the "earliest acknowledged poem," and of **The Revolt of Islam,** the lecturer wrote:

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* **Hogg's Instructor,** Vol. 4, New Series, 1850, pp. 257-259.
† **Fraser's Magazine,** July and August, 1851. Here quoted from **Essays by the Late George Brimley,** London, 1882. Third edition.
‡ **Essays,** pp. 111-112.
** Ibid., pp. 113-114.
†† Ibid., p. 114.

> The subject of **Alastor** . . . is, like that of Wordsworth's "Prelude," the development of a poet's mind, but much more vaguely and indefinitely brought before us. Even in this youthful production we have much of the mastery of diction, the picturesqueness of description, and the majestic imaginative gorgeousness of grace for which his maturer writings were distinguished. Its general aim is visionary and obscure, unless it may be found in a search after ideal perfection — some unapproachable and unattainable good — some Utopia of the imagination.

The allegorical **Revolt of Islam** he found even less attractive, because of the absence of human interest.

> It was an unhappy attempt to blend poetry with metaphysics; . . . He is anything but lucid or happy in the management of the plot or the arrangement of the incidents; but where it escapes from its so-called philosophy, which, when comprehensible, is utterly weak and worthless, the poem exhibits various passages remarkable for high imaginative passionate earnestness, or picturesque beauty. . . .*

In **The Cenci** Moir found powerful poetry, but he made the same objection to the subject which had been raised in Shelley's time. The narrowness of his position was evident from the fact that he would not permit even the classical **Oedipus Tyrannus** to serve as a legitimate precedent, nor even to stand as an unprotested masterpiece in its own right, inasmuch as it and other antique instances of awful themes must have been "surely . . . only lurid beacons to warn right feeling . . ." **The Cenci** was thought evocative of the old pity, but Moir would not admit the propriety of the evoking force. The play was finally characterized as the production of a "wayward, misguided, and singular man" and a sufficient indication of "the morbid perversion of his taste."

> Not only in exquisite description, but in dramatic energy, it may stand comparison with almost anything recent times have produced; but these excellencies are rendered literally nugatory from the repulsive horror with which its successive scenes are approached. To the intellectual sublime, it is what the Newgate Calendar is to the moral sublime; . . . †

Rosalind and Helen was also included among the "perverted" poems.
Prometheus Unbound was found "unsubstantial, wire-drawn, unintelligible," although it was deemed to possess much of the "simple and severe Greek spirit" and to contain "several splendid soliloquies, descriptions, and lyrical effervescences."

> We have shadows of power, rather than power itself — little that is real or tangible, or appertaining either to the beauty or majesty of physical nature; nothing to touch our hearts, or awaken our sympathies. All is mystic, ideal, involved, remote, cloudy, or abstract. . . . So recondite does Shelley sometimes become, that even language itself, of which he was one of the greatest masters — greater, perhaps, than even Thomas De Quincey — occasionally breaks down under him. . . . He is, assuredly, the most ethereal of all our poets, alike in imagery and language; his imagery dealing principally with elemental nature, while his language, in delicate tenuity, seems almost fitted to describe dissolving views, as they "come like shadows, so depart."‡

Shelley's other works were found to fail and succeed much in the manner of these; the essayist thought him unfitted to triumph in the longer poem, and deemed the recognition in his own time of his lyrical gift an adequate tribute.

> Even now he is principally remembered by his lesser works — his "Sensitive Plant," his "Skylark," his "Cloud," his "Marianne's Dream," his lines "To a Lady with a Guitar," his "Stanzas written in dejection at Naples," and his "Lines to an Indian Air"; . . . It would be difficult to excel several isolated stanzas in the "Address to the Skylark"; but "The Sensitive Plant" and the "Cloud" are, in my opinion, by far the most exquisite and original of all his conceptions: they approach, as nearly as possible, to what has been somewhat quaintly denominated "pure poetry"; and are as unique, in their wild ethereal beauty, as the "Kilmeny" of Hogg, or "The Ancient Marinere" of Coleridge.**

Passages from **The Sensitive Plant** and **The Cenci** were used to show Shelley at his best; but a test of the finest poetry was imposed which, by its nature, left him no more than half the essential qualities of greatness.

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* **Sketches of the Poetical Literature of the Past Half-Century, in Six Lectures Delivered at the Edinburgh Philosophical Association,** D. M. Moir, Edinburgh and London, 1851, p. 222.
† Ibid., pp. 222-223.
‡ Ibid., pp. 224-225.
** Ibid., p. 225.

> Gorgeous, graceful, and subtle qualities it indeed invariably possesses; . . . but he had only a section of the essential properties necessary to constitute a master in the art. The finest poetry is that . . . which is most patent to the general understanding, and hence to the approval or disapproval of the common sense of mankind. . . . Verse that will not stand being read aloud before a jury of common sense men, is . . . wanting in some great essential quality.

Shelley and his followers were thus thought deficient because

> these writers have left the highways of truth and nature, and, seeking the bye-lanes, have there, mistaking the uncommon for the valuable, bowed down to the idols of affectation and false taste.*

In this connection, Shelley was credited with having exerted a considerable influence, and that not for good, over the poets who followed him. This influence, together with the substance of the poet's views, was finally attributed, in part, to a diseased mind:

> Shelley was undoubtedly a man of genius — of very high genius — but of a peculiar and unhealthy kind. . . . His sensibilities were over acute; his morality was thoroughly morbid; his metaphysical speculations illogical, incongruous, incomprehensible — alike baseless and objectless. . . . For the law of gravitation . . . he substituted some undemonstrable dreamlike reflection of a dream, which he termed intellectual beauty. Life, according to him, was a phantasmagorial pictured vision, mere colours on the sunset clouds; and earth a globe hung on nothing — self-governing, yet, strange to say, without laws. It is gratuitous absurdity to call his mystical speculations a search after truth; they are no such thing; and are as little worth the attention of reasoning and responsible man as the heterogeneous reveries of nightmare. They are a mere flaring up in the face of all that Revelation has mercifully disclosed, and all that sober Reason has confirmed. Shelley's faith was a pure psychological negation, and cannot be confuted, simply because it asserts nothing; and, under the childish idea that all the crime, guilt, and misery of the world resulted from — what? — not the depravity of individuals, but from the very means, civil and ecclesiastical, by which these, in all ages and nations, have been at least attempted to be controlled, he seemed to take an insane delight in selecting, for poetical illustration, subjects utterly loathesome and repulsive; and which religion and morality, the virtuous and the pure, the whole natural heart and spirit of upright man, either rises up in rebellion against, or shrinks back from instinctively, and with horror.†

The significance of Moir's lecture lies in its implication that the poetical ideals of the moralistic nature poetry and of the literature of normal and pious human life had persisted in Scotland long after the years when they had first come into conflict with the living and developing Shelley. The appreciation of the verse of the "graveyard school" and of the later tendencies of Rogers, Crabbe, and Campbell is not to be quarreled with, except as it was extended to prohibit and proscribe loftier and more esoteric writings. The charge of affectation appears absurd as applied to most of Shelley's poetry, and tends to convict its proponent of deficiency in the intellectual sympathy which is essential to criticism. The description of Shelley's philosophy as mere negation proves upon its author a pernicious blindness to that whole side of the poet's work which tirelessly affirmed, in positive prophecy of the new world. And the appeal to "common sense" and universal acceptance as the final tests of poetic merit not only limits poetry to its most obvious and least exalted phase, but suggests that in mid-century Scotland it had become a commodity similar to the Johnsonian oats, in its adaptation to the undiscriminating appetite of the populace.

We have noticed the application to Shelley of two chief types of critical generalization: the interpretative use of theories about the functioning of the creative mind; and the formulation, for purposes of judgment, of definitions of creative art. Both of these methods were employed by Browning in his "Introduction," better known as the **Essay on Shelley**, which he wrote for Moxon's **Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley** in 1852. The fact that almost all of the letters were found to be forgeries did not invalidate the essay, which dealt in the most general way with Shelley's genius and scarcely mentioned the volume to which it was attached.

The two essential questions discussed in the essay were, first, the significance of biography in the interpretation of an intensely subjective genius; and, second, the nature of the standard upon which assignments of poetic rank should properly be based.

First, the differing natures of objective and subjective art were described and examined. The objective poet was regarded as

> one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the manifested action of the human

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* Ibid., pp. 227-228.
† Ibid., pp. 228-229.

heart and brain) with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men, assumed capable of receiving and profiting by this reproduction. . . . The auditory of such a poet will include, not only the intelligences which, save for such assistance, would have missed the deeper meaning and enjoyment of the original objects, but also the spirits of a like endowment with his own, who, by means of his abstract, can forthwith pass to the reality it was made from, and either corroborate their impressions of things known already, or supply themselves with new from whatever shows in the inexhaustible variety of existence may have hitherto escaped their knowledge. Such a poet is properly . . . the fashioner; and the thing fashioned, his poetry, will of necessity be substantive, projected from himself and distinct. . . . The man passes, the work remains. The work speaks for itself, as we say: and the biography of the worker is no more necessary to an understanding or enjoyment of it, than is a model or anatomy of some tropical tree, to the right tasting of the fruit we are familiar with on the market-stall. . . . *

The nature of the subjective poet (and to this class Shelley was thought to have belonged) was considered such as to necessitate biographical enlightenment for its complete comprehension. In the essay the description of the poet of this type seems identical with Browning's conception of Shelley.

He, gifted like the objective poet with the fuller perception of nature and man, is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the One above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth, — an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul. Not what man sees, but what God sees — the **Ideas** of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand — it is toward these that he struggles. Not with the combination of humanity in action, but with the primal elements of humanity he has to do; and he digs where he stands, — preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak. Such a poet does not deal habitually with the picturesque groupings and tempestuous tossings of the forest-trees, but with their roots and fibres naked to the chalk and stone. He does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes: we must look deep into his human eyes, to see those pictures on them. He is rather a seer, accordingly, than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence. That effluence cannot be easily considered in abstraction from his personality, — being indeed the very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated. Therefore, in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality of the poet; in apprehending it we apprehend him, and certainly we cannot love it without loving him.†

The difference between the two types of poetic mind was seen as manifesting itself in their differing attitudes toward the external world:

. . . the subjective poet, whose study has been himself, appealing through himself to the absolute Divine mind, prefers to dwell upon those external scenic appearances which strike out most abundantly and uninterruptedly his inner light and power, selects that silence of the earth and sea in which he can best hear the beating of his individual heart, and leaves the noisy, complex, yet imperfect exhibitions of nature in the manifold experience of man around him, which serve only to distract and suppress the working of his brain. . . . It would be idle to inquire, of these two kinds of poetic faculty in operation, which is the higher or even rarer endowment.‡

The two faculties were thought to exist sometimes in the same poet, and to alternate one with the other in the history of poets and poetry, according to the spiritual temper of periods, and the needs, on the one hand, for the interpretation of momentarily adequate experience, and, on the other, for the acquisition of new objective experience for its own sake. This distinction was rendered for the purpose of indicating that a biographical knowledge is necessary for the understanding of the interpretative artist, while it is not essential for the understanding of the reproductive artist.

Next, it was held by Browning that a high moral purpose is essential to the complete production of great poetry, and that especially when such poetry falls short of complete expression, the artist's motives must be examined in other manifestations than his work itself, if the degree of his genius is to be understood.

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* Browning's "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley" in Vol. 3 of the Percy Reprints, edited by H. F. B. Brett-Smith, New York and Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1921, pp. 63-65.

† Ibid., pp. 65-66.

‡ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

> Certainly, in the face of any conspicuous achievement of genius, philosophy, no less than sympathetic instinct, warrants our belief in a great moral purpose having mainly inspired even where it does not visibly look out of the same. Greatness in a work suggests an adequate instrumentality; and none of the lower incitements, however they may avail to initiate or even effect many considerable displays of power, simulating the nobler inspiration to which they are mistakenly referred, have been found able, under the ordinary conditions of humanity, to task themselves to the end of so exacting a performance as a poet's complete work. . . . Also, assuming the proper moral aim to have produced a work, there are many and various states of an aim: it may be more intense than clear-sighted, or too easily satisfied with a lower field of activity than a steadier aspiration would reach. . . . we must in every case betake ourselves to the review of a poet's life ere we determine some of the nicer questions concerning his poetry, — more especially if the performance we seek to estimate aright, has been obstructed and cut short of completion by circumstances, — a disastrous youth or a premature death. We may learn from the biography whether his spirit invariably saw and spoke from the last height to which it had attained.*

Thus Browning attempted to show the significance of biography in the study of such a poet as Shelley. The implication, though not the essential assertion of this reasoning, was that a valuable contribution to such personal knowledge of the poetry had been made in the letters which were thus introduced.

The second important contention of the essay was that the genius and rank of a poet should be determined by the degree in which he possessed the essence of the poetical quality of mind; it was held that, if judged by this standard, Shelley would rank far higher than if less correctly evaluated by his mere achievement in expression. In spite of the revelation of the man in his work, it was thought that this highest poetical quality should be examined in its domination of the man, as well as in its evocation of the poems. The description of this highest genius, as it resided in Shelley, was perhaps Browning's most interesting contribution to the interpretation of that poet, as it was the shining instance of the great Victorian's use of critical prose. Shelley had possessed

> the whole poet's virtue, I repeat, of looking higher than any manifestation yet made of both beauty and good, in order to suggest from the utmost actual realization of the one a corresponding capability in the other, and out of the calm, purity and energy of nature, to reconstitute and store up for the forthcoming stage of man's being, a gift in repayment of that former gift, in which man's own thought and passion had been lavished by the poet on the else-incompleted magnificence of the sunrise, the else-uninterpreted mystery of the lake, — so drawing out, lifting up, and assimilating this ideal of a future man, thus descried as possible, to the present reality of the poet's soul already arrived at the higher state of development, and still aspirant to elevate and extend itself in conformity with its still-improving perceptions of, no longer the eventual Human, but the actual Divine. In conjunction with which noble and rare powers, came the subordinate power of delivering these attained results to the world in an embodiment of verse more closely answering to and indicative of the process of the informing spirit, (failing as it occasionally does, in art, only to succeed in highest art), — with a diction more adequate to the task in its natural and acquired richness, its material colour and spiritual transparency, — the whole being moved by and suffused with a music at once of the soul and the sense, expressive both of an external might of sincere passion and an internal fitness and consonancy, — than can be attributed to any other writer whose record is among us. Such was the spheric poetical faculty of Shelley, as its own self-sufficing central light, radiating equally through immaturity and accomplishment, through many fragments and occasional completion, reveals it to a competent judgment.†

The blindness of Shelley's own age to this transcendent talent was regarded as another reason, added to the inherently subjective nature of his work, why a biography should at once be written for the complementary purposes of revealing his essential moral excellence and permitting the fullest understanding of his poems in the light of his true character. It was held that his youthful errors should be forgiven him, the more because his development beyond their limitations was cut short by early death. The letters were thought significant as a slight addition to such understanding, and as a revelation of the consistent and organic sincerity which pervaded poet and poetry alike. They were evidence of philanthropy of spirit — an element of the moral eminence of all great poets — and they were proof of the fact that the "poetical mood of Shelley" was no more than "the intensification of his habitual mood." It is a tribute to the forger, perhaps, that the conclusions drawn by Browning from his fabrications might as readily have been deduced from letters of unquestioned authenticity.

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* Ibid., pp. 69-70.
† Ibid., pp. 71-72.

> Whatever Shelley was, he was with an admirable sincerity. It was not always truth that he thought and spoke; but in the purity of truth he spoke and thought always. Everywhere is apparent his belief in the existence of Good, to which Evil is an accident; his faithful holding by what he assumed to be the former, going everywhere in company with the tenderest pity for those acting or suffering on the opposite hypothesis. For he was tender, though tenderness is not always the characteristic of very sincere natures; he was eminently both tender and sincere. And not only do the same affection and yearning after the well-being of his kind, appear in the letters as in the poems, but they express themselves by the same theories and plans, however crude and unsound. There is no reservation of a subtler, less costly, more serviceable remedy for his own ill, than he has proposed for the general one; nor does he ever contemplate an object on his own account, from a less elevation than he uses in exhibiting it to the world.*

The errors of Shelley's youthful schemes were seen as the result of this sincerity, inasmuch as it had led him into the intensely practical application of what might otherwise have rested as harmless theorizing.

> But, in Shelley's case, the early fervour and power to **see**, was accompanied by as precocious a fertility to **contrive**: he endeavoured to realise as he went on idealising: every wrong had simultaneously its remedy, and, out of the strength of his hatred for the former, he took the strength of his confidence in the latter — till suddenly he stood pledged to the defence of a set of miserable little expedients, just as if they represented great principles, and to an attack upon various great principles, really so, without leaving himself time to examine whether, because they were antagonistical to the remedy he had suggested, they must therefore be identical or even essentially connected with the wrong he sought to cure, — playing with blind passion into the hands of his enemies, and dashing at whatever red cloak was held forth to him, as the cause of the fireball he had last been stung with — mistaking Churchdom for Christianity, and for marriage, "the sale of love" and the law of sexual oppression.†

Browning perceived the growth away from this intemperate practicality, which had had little to recommend it except its passion and consistency, into the later search for the absolute truth which should serve the highest moral ends with the indirection of great poetry.

> Gradually, however, he was leaving behind him this low practical dexterity, unable to keep up with his widening intellectual perception; and, in exact proportion as he did so, his true power strengthened and proved itself. Gradually he was raised above the contemplation of spots and the attempt at defacing them, to the great Abstract Light, and, through the discrepancy of the creation, to the sufficiency of the First Cause. Gradually he was learning that the best way of removing abuses is to stand fast by truth.‡

It was in connection with this annunciation of Shelley's expanding sense of divinity that Browning expressed the opinion that he would eventually, had he lived, have been numbered with the Christians. The worship, to which Shelley actually attained, of a Spirit of Good seemed to him to lead inevitably in that direction.

Putting the conjecture aside, however, Browning was sure that Shelley's had been an intensely religious mind; here again, the essayist tended to identify "religious" with "Christian."

> Meantime, as I call Shelley a moral man, because he was true, simple-hearted, and brave, and because what he acted corresponded to what he knew, so I call him a man of religious mind, because every audacious negative cast up by him against the Divine was interpenetrated with a mood of reverence and adoration, — and because I find him everywhere taking for granted some of the capital dogmas of Christianity, while most vehemently denying their historical basement.**

To this was added the statement that one positive evidence of the presence of religion was to be counted more weighty than many repudiations.

Following a further apology for the weaknesses and delusions of Shelley's youth, the essay closed with the dogma that the poet must be judged by his inherent genius rather than by his achievement; and this was supplemented by a description, more specific than the former one, of the quality of the genius that had dwelt in Shelley.

> Let me conclude with a thought of Shelley as a poet. In the hierarchy of creative minds, it is the presence of the highest faculty that gives first

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* Ibid., p. 75.
† Ibid., p. 77.
‡ Ibid., p. 78.
** Ibid., p. 79.

rank, in virtue of its kind, not degree; no pretension of a lower nature, whatever the completeness of development or variety of effect, impeding the precedency of the rarer endowment though only in the germ. . . . I pass at once, therefore, from Shelley's minor excellencies to his noblest and predominating characteristic.

This I call his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws, from his poet's station between both, swifter, subtler, and more numerous films for the connexion of each with each, than have been thrown by any modern artificer of whom I have knowledge: proving how, as he says,

"The spirit of the worm within the sod,
In love and worship blends itself with God."

I would rather consider Shelley's poetry as a sublime fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal, than I would isolate and separately appraise the worth of many detachable portions which might be acknowledged as utterly perfect in a lower point of view, under the mere conditions of art. It would be easy to take my stand on successful instances of objectivity in Shelley: there is the unrivalled "Cenci"; there is the "Julian and Maddalo" too; there is the magnificent "Ode to Naples": why not regard, it may be said, the less organised matter as the radiant elemental foam and solution, out of which would have been evolved, eventually, creations as perfect even as those? But I prefer to look for the highest attainment, not simply the high, — and, seeing it, I hold by it. There is surely enough of the work "Shelley" to be known enduringly among men, and, I believe, to be accepted of God, as human work may; and around the imperfect proportions of such, the most elaborated productions of ordinary art must arrange themselves as inferior illustrations.*

Reviews of the essay agreed in calling Browning's discussion obscure and in agreeing with its affirmation of the essentially Christian character of the poet. Said the **New Monthly Magazine:**

. . . readily do we echo his conviction that the time is past for confounding with genuine infidelity, and an atheism of the heart, those passionate impatient struggles of a boy towards distant truth and love.†

The **Literary Gazette,** once so hostile to the poet, made similar amends:

The good name of Shelley needs to be redeemed from defamation, for the honour of British literature and for the good of his country men. Had he lived he would have survived slander, and repaired in his own mind the undoubted evils which gave occasion to it. . . . Shelley was no atheist. The spirit of Christianity pervaded his life, and actuated his conduct even when he was most loudly inveighing against its dogmas.‡

Dowden, in his **Life of Robert Browning,** characterized the essay as being chiefly of interest for its exposition of certain views of Browning about poetry, though not without some significance for Shelley. The idea of unaccomplished aspiration was a favorite one with the Victorian poet, and may have determined his criterion of poetic genius. He recognized also, as Dowden observed, the effective moral meaning of Shelley's work.

For Browning the poet of **Prometheus Unbound** was not that beautiful and ineffectual angel of Matthew Arnold's fancy, beating in the void his luminous wings. A great moral purpose looked forth from Shelley's work, as it does, Browning would add, from all lofty works of art. . . . The principle, again, by which he determined an artist's rank is in harmony with Browning's general feeling that men are to be judged less by their actual achievements than by the possibilities that lie unfolded within them, and the ends to which they aspire, even though such ends be unattained.**

Browning was thus fitted by native philosophy with a singularly fortunate standard for the judgment of Shelley, who achieved neither his artistic maturity nor the final and palpable effect toward which his art was directed. But this standard seems, in this essay, to have been evolved quite independently of the author's admiration of Shelley, and is more significant as a contribution to the theory of criticism than as a commentary upon that one of the Romantic poets to whom it could most aptly be applied. It is impossible to say, of course, whether his early apprenticeship to

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* Ibid., p. 82.
† **New Monthly Magazine,** 1852, Vol. 94, pp. 357-360.
‡ **Literary Gazette,** 1852, February 21.
** Dowden's **Life of Robert Browning,** Everyman's Library edition, London and New York, Dutton and Dent, 1915, pp. 145-147.

Shelley had not had something to do with the conception of Browning's ideal poet.

The essay exemplifies the fact, already seen ,that the Victorian critics were usually more fortunate in their general descriptive summaries of Shelley's nature and art than in their detailed judgments of his works. Browning agreed with his period in thinking Shelley's early crotchets of reform worthless and inhibiting by-products of his philanthropic zeal. He agreed in the view of Shelley as bard and in that of Shelley as noble idealist. His essay struck upon new truth in its exposition of the real moral force of Shelley's work, the effectual assimilation of human and eternal truth. Shelley's aim had meant to many critics merely subversive social change; to Browning, while he saw the errors of its proponent, it meant what Shelley had spoken of in the **Defence**: the exaltation of the human mind, through its perceived kinship with the divine, to a realization of its most noble dormant traits. It was such interpretation as this that Shelley had written into the best of his prefaces, and the poetic expression of which in his works had gone so long without its recognition.

But more original than even its application to Shelley was Browning's formulation of fundamental truth about all art. His description of the high poetic faculty furnishes a standard which stands in the same relationship to general interpretation as the "tuning fork" method does to specific appreciation. This and the formulation of the law of the moral influence of art entitle the essay to a place among truly creative contributions to the literature of literary appreciation, both theoretical and applied.

Two minor contributions of the period will serve to indicate the attention paid to Shelley's influence upon the century. This influence was seen as poetical rather than sociological. Clara Lucas Balfour, in her studies of English literature, included Shelley among the "illustrious youthful poets" of the period, along with Kirke White, Keats, and Robert Pollok.* She was of the school of mid-century critics who overlooked, with Christian forbearance, the revolutionary doctrines of the poet in their plea for a gentle judgment upon his intensely spiritual character. Mrs. Balfour was chiefly concerned with Shelley's influence, and found that it was greatest upon the most religious and devotional poets of the succeeding years. Shelley had earlier been represented as the "Eternal Child" by reason of the purity and ethereal spirit of his life and character; in the mid-century he became the "Eternal Child" by reason of the mysticism of his verse. In this book he was represented as an angel of poetic light, patron saint of religious voluptuary poets.

> They read his dreamy musings, share his enchanted reverie, enjoy the sensuous spirituality of his imagery, and revel in the voluptuous melody of his verse. No wonder, then, that the instructed reader often catches a tone of his voice, a subtle interflowing of his imagery in the lays of many a gifted living poet, male and female. And of these poets, the more devotional their spirit, the more decidedly Christian their stanzas, the more this influence is manifest.

Such was, in part, the Shelley legend of the period; the cry of the reformer was lost to ears attentive to his seductive mysticism. It is not surprising that Mrs. Balfour, in enumerating his lyric triumphs, made no mention of the **Ode to the West Wind.**

Another statement of his influence was recorded for the glory of Eton, of which institution he had been a son. The tone of this sketch, in Edward S. Creasy's estimates of distinguished students of Eton, was one of apology for Shelley's mistaken ideas. It affirmed the poet's great literary influence, but what that influence was, whether of thought or merely of style and imaginative habit, it did not set forth.

> Shelley's poetry has had, and must continue to have, far too great an influence on our literature to make it possible to omit his name in any work which professes to enumerate the great writers of any institution to which he ever belonged, or, indeed, in any series of memoirs of the English poets. Many of his contemporaries, and nearly all the poetical writers of any eminence since his time, bear visible traces of how much they imbued themselves with Shelley's poetry. I will mention, as instances of this, Keats, Miss Landon, Monckton Milnes, Browning, and Tennyson. No one, indeed, who is unacquainted with Shelley, can be aware of the full richness of our language.

Further evidence, from **Adonais** to prove the poet's belief in the soul's immortality, and from his translations to demonstrate his accurate scholarship, served Creasy in establishing Shelley upon the respectable pedestal of an Eminent Etonian.†

The peculiarly hostile study of Shelley by Charles Kingsley also took notice of this influence, but in a different way.‡ Shelley, wrote Kingsley, though in general inferior to Byron, had fathered a school of poets who were called Byronic but who were really Shelleyan.

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* **Sketches of English Literature,** London, 1852.

† See p. 481 of **Memoirs of Eminent Etonians,** London, 1850. Shelley and Praed represented "The Nineteenth Century."

‡ **Fraser's Magazine,** 1853, Vol. 48, pp. 568-576. An essay entitled "Thoughts on Shelley and Byron," attributed to Kingsley by Anderson in his British Museum bibliography, in Sharp's **Life of Shelley,** p. xiv.

The essay was a skillful and bitter depreciation of Shelley, without a grain of sympathy for him. Its author was obviously a man of broad intellect, facile pen, common sense, and respect for legalistic morals. Moreover, he had a thesis for which to argue: Byron was being neglected and the affected Shelleyan creed was all the rage. This, he thought, boded ill for the taste of English readers, and should be amended.

Kingsley was conscious that there had been a Romantic Movement; he had an historical perspicacity which recognized the underlying tendencies of the era which had preceded the Victorian. The noble principles of that movement, he thought, had been denied by the practices of their proponents. Romanticism had believed in Freedom, in Nature; but its best writers had played their muses false, and expressed circumscription and affectation. These Romanticists had been strong men, conscious that "they were standing between two worlds; amid the ruins of an older age; upon the threshold of a new one"; and Shelley especially had been aware of this, for he had looked longingly and prophetically toward the new. But this sense of transition had taken ill effect upon the followers of the poetry of that time of change.

Kingsley made much of the fact that Byron, in one of his spasmodic critical utterances, had not named Shelley among the foremost poets of his time. He observed with some disgust that this evaluation had not been taken to heart by his own generation; Shelley had displaced his nobler contemporary in the reading mind.

> The private tippling of eau-de-cologne, say the London physicians, has increased mightily of late; and so has the reading of Shelley.*

And this demoralizing influence was being blamed upon the "Byronic" school! Kingley's partisan irony was quite unbecoming critical scholarship.

> Among the many good-going gentlemen and ladies, Byron is generally spoken of with horror — he is "so wicked," forsooth; while poor Shelley, "poor dear Shelley," is "very wrong, of course," but "so refined," "so beautiful," "so tender" — a fallen angel, while Byron is a satyr and a devil. We boldly deny the verdict. . . . And, at all events, Byron never set to work to consecrate his own sin into a religion, and proclaim the worship of uncleanness as the last and highest ethical development of "pure" humanity. No — Byron may be brutal; but he never cants. If at moments he finds himself in hell, he never turns round to the world, and melodiously informs them that it is heaven, if they could but see it in its true light.†

The attitudes of the two poets toward external law was most interestingly put. One, in spite of his rebellion, had always admitted restraint from on high; the other had persistently denied the right of such intervention.

> There is . . . a deeper moral difference between the men, which makes the weaker, rather than the stronger, find favour in young men's eyes. For Byron has the most intense and awful sense of moral law — of law external to himself. Shelley has little or none; less, perhaps, than any known writer who has ever meddled with moral questions. . . . His whole life through was a denial of external law, and a substitution in its place of internal sentiment. Byron's cry is, There is a law, and therefore I am miserable. Why cannot I keep the law? Shelley's is, There is a law, and therefore I am miserable. Why should not the law be abolished?‡

Thus Shelley was reduced to the role of an empty and selfish sentimentalist, who had had no more valid reason for his rebellion than the desire to satisfy fantastic personal whims and appetites.

> This is Shelley; a sentimentalist pure and simple: incapable of anything like inductive reasoning; unable to take cognizance of any facts but those which please his taste, or to draw any conclusion from them but such as also pleases his taste. . . . The lawlessness of the man, with the sensibility of the woman. . . His cries are like the wails of a child, inarticulate, peevish, irrational; and yet his pain fills his whole being, blackens the very face of nature to him; but he will not confess himself in the wrong.**

Out of this sentimental anarchy, as Kingsley saw it, had arisen an influence as pernicious as attractive to the younger mind.

> The mischief which such a man would do is conceivable enough. He stands out, both by his excellencies and by his defects, as the spokesman and ideal of all the unrest and unhealth of sensitive young men for many a year after. . . . Still, we must accept his hope and faith in the spirit, not in the letter. . . . And yet what dream at once more shallow and more unprofitable?

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* Ibid., p. 570.
† Ibid., pp. 570-571.
‡ Ibid., p. 571.
** Ibid., p. 572.

Whereupon Kingsley took up the "dream," not in the spirit, but in the letter, and reviewed the Shelleyan condemnations of kings, priests, marriage, and the like.

The beauty of his poetry, however, was readily admitted — with qualifications.

> In spite of all his faults — and there are few poetic faults in which he does not indulge . . . in spite of his "interfluous" and "innumerous" and the rest of it — in spite of bombast, horrors, maundering, sheer stuff and nonsense of all kinds, there is a plaintive natural melody about this man, such as no other English poet has ever uttered, except Shakespeare, in some few immortal songs.*

But the emasculated followers of this song had practised his faults rather than his virtues, and foisted upon England a school of romantic bosh, for which Byron, lover of Pope, was receiving the blame.

> How much more pleasant a leader, then, must Shelley be, who unquestionably did scale his little Olympus — having made it himself first to fit his own stature. . . . For after all Shelley's range of vision is very narrow, his subjects few, his reflections still fewer. . . . He has a deep heart, but not a wide one; an intense eye, but not a catholic one. And, therefore, he never wrote a real drama; for in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, Beatrice Cenci is really none other than Percy Bysshe Shelley himself in petticoats.†

Kingsley's quarrel was, first, with the taste of his time — with the school of thin-blooded Shelleyites. Next, it was with Shelley himself, for having failed to accommodate himself to the world, the moral code, and the external law of society. Kingsley took no account of that higher moral law that rises from within, that transcendental code of the aspiring spirit, which Shelley had preached as assiduously as ever he did the negative doctrine of revolt. There may be reasonable debate upon Shelley's specific social reformations — the expressions of his lower, earlier, and more pragmatic phase; there can, however, be little doubt about his intense moral seriousness and the validity of his higher legislation of aspiring and self-perfecting spirituality. Kingsley made his fundamental error not in protesting against the concrete revolt, nor in protesting against bad taste and the abrogation of temporally necessary restraint, but in his reduction of the motive of moral idealism to the aspect of a selfish and fantastic hedonism. His position is comparable to that of Shelley's contemporaries who found in the idealized women of **Prometheus Unbound** the dalliant personnel of a Mohammedan paradise of love and license.

Another error of Kingsley consisted in representing the moral which may be drawn from Byron's work as a moral which was consciously intended. He underestimated Byron's sensuous details as he underestimated Shelley's vision of truth. He exaggerated Byron's effect for moral good as he exaggerated the element of hectic stimulus in Shelley. The prodigal son has always made better sermon material than Joseph, for all the famous coat of many colors.

Finally, Kingsley appeared in this essay as an intellectual moralist, conventional in spite of his vigor of mind, and a literal interpreter of poetry, whose voice, for all its rancour, wholesomely protested the flowering sentimental Shelley legend, and cried lamentation for the decline of the parable of Byronic classicism.

An important essay by Walter Bagehot, which appeared first in the **National Review,** was an interpretation of Shelley as a being of "impulse," a man who was tormented by the realities of life and who tried to escape from the actual world.‡ It did not attempt a complete criticism, having been "only aimed to show how some of the peculiarities of his works and life may be traced to the peculiarities of his nature."** The study was written at a date when no full biography of Shelley was in existence, and the author fell at times into the doubtful practice of making the poems render service as biographical documents. This, however, was not carried to such an extreme as necessarily to invalidate the consequent interpretations of the poet. The essay was capable, thoughtful, and faithful to the spirit of good appreciative writing — a notable addition to those criticisms which established an inseparable relationship between the poet and his poetry and made use of each to elucidate the other.

The discussion of Shelley as a man of "impulse" was introduced by a statement of the two modes in which this poet, in common with a multitude of others, had left with his readers the delineation of himself.

> No writer has left so clear an image of himself in his writings. . . . Some authors try in imagination to get outside of themselves — to contemplate their character as a fact, and to describe it and the movement of their own actions as external forms and images. Scarcely any one has done this as

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* Ibid., pp. 573-574.

† Ibid., p. 575.

‡ "Percy Bysshe Shelley": **National Review,** No. 6, October, 1856. It was published among the **Estimates of Some Englishmen and Scotchmen** (from the **National Review**), 1858, and later included in **Literary Studies,** 1878. References are to the Everyman Library edition of **Literary Studies,** London, Dutton, 1911.

** P. 111.

often as Shelley. There is hardly any of his longer works which does not contain a finished picture of himself in some point or under some circumstances.*

This was the first method by which poets achieve self-delineation. As to the second:

> Again, some writers, almost or quite unconsciously, by a special instinct of style, give an idea of themselves. . . . Shelley has this peculiarity also. Every line of his has a personal impress, an unconscious inimitable manner.†

The distinction by which Bagehot attempted to define the nature and personality of Shelley was that between the almost universal type of man whose life is a perennial conscious conflict between contending impulses to good and to evil, and the far rarer type of human nature which experiences no such struggle. Of this latter type, to which Shelley had been one of the closest approximations, the critic said:

> They have no lower desires to pull down, for they have no higher ones which come into collision with them; the very words 'lower' and 'higher,' involving the contemporaneous action and collision of two impulses, are inapplicable to them; there is no strife; all their soul impels them in a single line.‡

This nature he illustrated by telling the "legend" of Shelley's capricious purchase of a microscope, which, in equally capricious fashion, he immediately sold to satisfy the needs of a stranger in distress.

The single impulse had been, with Shelley, "a passion for reforming mankind." Its manifestation in the poet's behavior Bagehot illustrated with the quotation from Hazlitt's "On Paradox and Commonplace" in which the author of **Prometheus** was said to have had "a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophic fanatic." By accepting this judgment Bagehot ranked himself among the sane and conservative who have found it "most dangerous to be possessed with an idea."

This theory of the "single impulse" he consistently applied, throughout the body of the criticism, to Shelley's temperament and to his poetry; it formed the structural unity of the essay. Since the appreciations of the poems were thus related to a central thesis, it may be most convenient, taking them in the order used by the author, to show the connection of each with the doctrine of the critic.

Turning away, for the moment, from the reform motif, Bagehot applied his unifying principle to Shelley's theory of love. This theory, he maintained, constituted a "deification of impulse"; love was, for Shelley, "inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness." Shelley's utterance on this point, though the writer attributed it to the **Queen Mab** period, seemed to him to be valid for the poet's later and consistent attitude. Bagehot's use of the **Epipsychidion** in support of this contention will illustrate his method of interpreting Shelley by means of the poetry:

> The 'Epipsychidion' could not have been written by a man who attached a moral value to constancy of **mind.****

Further support for his thesis Bagehot discovered in the fact that the characters of the poems were all of them creatures of impulse, and usually possessed by a passion for reform: Laon, Lionel, Cythna, the poet in **Alastor,** even Beatrice and Count Cenci were alike in this, that they were moved each by a single uninhibited impulse. This interpretation represented these characters as extremely simple; they were thought of as the creations of an equally simple temperament, and like their creator. The first three persons were reformers; the poet of **Alastor** was mastered by a passion to penetrate the mysteries of existence. All the reformers were alike in the poet's description of them; each preached the same transfiguration of mankind.

> All the world is evil, until some unknown conqueror shall appear — a teacher by rhapsody and a conqueror by words — who shall at once reform all evil. Mathematicians place great reliance on the unknown symbol, great X. Shelley did more; he expected it would take life, and reform our race. Such impersonations are, of course, not real men; they are mere incarnations of a desire.††

The personification in **Alastor,** however, the critic found greatly superior to these airy orators, and this seemed so because **Alastor** possessed "far greater closeness to reality." Both types of composition, nevertheless, were seen as expressions, with a difference, of the poet's own being; and, taken together, they confirmed the impression that Shelley was better fitted to become a seeker after abstract truth than to practise reform.

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* Pp. 66-67.
† P. 67.
‡ P. 68.
** P. 71.
†† P. 73.

> The one is a description of what he was; the other of what he desired to be. Shelley had nothing of the magic influence, the large insight, the bold strength, the permeating eloquence, which fit a man for a practical reformer: but he had, in perhaps an unequalled and unfortunate measure, the famine of the intellect — the daily insatiable craving after the highest truth which is the passion of 'Alastor.'*

In this connection, Bagehot questioned Shelley's dramatic detachment, and did not hesitate to put the words of the wanderer in **Alastor** into the mouth of the poet himself.

Count Cenci and Beatrice, though they were not to be classed among Shelley's abstract creations, were called, nevertheless, creatures of impulse. In the Count there was seen the single passion of evil for its own sake; in his daughter, the absorbing sense of her injuries. Both characters, because of this peculiar unity which he found in them, were exceedingly simple in the eyes of the critic. The most significant aspect of the whole play was, for Bagehot, the singular tendency toward the discrediting and overthrowing of the old characters by the young — "an extreme suspicion of aged persons" — and he thought that almost all of the old persons in Shelley's poetry were, for the poet, beings "whose authority it is desirable to disprove." It seemed to him obvious that Shelley had met during his life many men too far stultified by years to sympathize with his ache for reformation in the world. And this accounted, to the satisfaction of the critic, for Shelley's choice of a subject for his play.

> Not unnaturally, therefore, he selected for a tragedy a horrible subject from Italian story, in which an old man, accomplished in this world's learning, renowned for the 'cynic sneer of o'er experienced sin,' is the principal evil agent.†

This would seem as strange and untrue a motive as has ever been attributed to Shelley in connection with his tragic drama; and the interpretation would reduce Count Cenci to a mere symbol, which assuredly he is not.

The examination of the influences of Locke and Hume upon the poet, and the fact of his expulsion from Oxford, the critic combined to reveal and illustrate a character very little formed by external discipline and lacking in moral conscience. The lack of what Bagehot regarded as a valid religious faith he accounted for by saying that such a faith must rest upon moral cultivation, in which, as he thought, Shelley had been sadly deficient.

> In a character like Shelley's, where this haunting, abiding, oppressive moral feeling is wanting or defective, the religious belief in an Almighty God which springs out of it is likely to be defective likewise.‡

This deficiency he found to have been aggravated by the abstract nature of Shelley's intellect, which had rendered him incapable of the portrayal of any character except his own, and had made him one with the myth-makers of primitive races.** And this tendency toward abstraction had, in its turn, been accentuated by Shelley's ignorance of "realities."

> Before a man can imagine what will seem to be realities, he must be familiar with what are realities. The memory of Shelley had no heaped-up 'store of life,' no vast accumulation of familiar characters. His intellect did not tend to the strong grasp of realities, its taste was rather for the subtle refining of theories, the distilling of exquisite abstractions. His imagination personified what his understanding presented to it. It had nothing else to do. He displayed the same tendency of mind — sometimes negatively and sometimes positively — in his professedly religious inquiries. His belief went through three stages — first, materialism, then a sort of Nihilism, then a sort of Platonism. In neither of them is the rule of the universe ascribed to a character: in the first and last it is ascribed to animated abstractions; in the second there is no universe at all.††

Shelley had found the adequate description of his own peculiar universe in Lucretius and in Hume, and consequently lost sight of the real world.

> — his mind was filled with a swarm of ideas, fancies, thoughts, streaming on without his volition, without plan or order. He might be pardoned for thinking that they were all; he could not see the outward world for them; their giddy passage occupied him till he forgot himself.‡‡

Later, according to Bagehot's account of his spiritual history, Shelley found Plato

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* Pp. 73-74.
† P. 75.
‡ P. 82.
** Cf. Stopford Brooke, **Studies in Poetry,** on Shelley's myth-making faculty.
†† P. 83.
‡‡ P. 85.

and achieved his highest creed. But he felt nothing of the "Christian" quality of the philosopher, and attained unto no God.

> The theory of Plato, that the all-apparent phenomena were unreal, he believed already; he had a craving to believe in something noble, beautiful, and difficult to understand; he was ready, therefore, to accept the rest of that theory, and to believe that these passing phenomena were imperfect types and resemblances — imperfect incarnations, so to speak — of certain immoveable, eternal, archetypal realities. All his later writings are coloured by that theory. . . . There is in Shelley none of that unceasing reference to ethical consciousness and ethical religion which has for centuries placed Plato first among the preparatory preceptors of Christianity. The general doctrine is that
>
> 'The one remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light forever shines, earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of eternity,
> Until death tramples it to fragments.'
>
> The particular worship of the poet is paid to that one spirit whose
>
> 'Plastic stress
> Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
> All new successions to the forms they wear;
> Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
> To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
> And bursting in its beauty and its might
> From trees, and beasts, and men, into the heaven's light.'
>
> It is evident that not even in this, the highest form of creed to which he ever clearly attained, is there any such distinct conception of a character as is essential to a real religion. . . . the 'spirit' has no will, and no virtue: it is animated, but unholy; alive, but unmoral: it is an object of intense admiration; it is not an object of worship.*

Thus, Bagehot denied Shelley not only the God of orthodoxy but any valid and authentically religious conception of deity. His prerequisites were that God, to be God, must be conceived as a Person, possessing will, virtue, holiness; embodying a moving and consistent moral force; inspiring worship rather than mere wonder. The critic denied that the poet had known the critic's God, in which he was perfectly right. To his assumption that his own definition of God was of universal application, and self-evidently true, there stand opposed the just questionings of those who, while feeling that they have a valid conception of divinity and a religious attitude of soul, challenge his Personal God as bordering upon the anthropomorphic, his "will" and "virtue" as limited terms of a contemporary and transitory code of ethics, his "holiness" as mere ecclesiastical tradition, and his "worship" as the sincere but automatic genuflexion of Victorian orthodoxy — who find less of fidelity to the eternal verities in the critic's code than in the soul of the poet standing in triumphant adoration of the Universal Beauty.

This chiefly courteous and scholarly depreciation of Shelley's religion seems hardly just when we discover that Bagehot, harking back to his original theory of the poet's personality, attributed his lack of a savingly concrete idea of God to that very tendency to abstraction which was inherent in the poet and beyond his control. Bagehot quoted eminent French authority for the view that personality, and the distinct consciousness of personality, are dependent upon the presence of will. In Shelley, a person of pure and uninhibited impulse, he thought that this element of will had been lacking, and that there had resulted a consequent deficiency in personality (in its most literal sense) and in the poet's ability to conceive of personalities — a consequent habit of abstract thinking and visioning:

> — a mind ordinarily moved by simple impulse will have little distinct consciousness of personality. While thrust forward by such impulse, it is a mere instrument. Outward things set it in motion. It goes where they bid; it exerts no will upon them; it is, to speak expressively, a mere conducting thing. When such a mind is free from such impulse, there is even less will; thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions, pass before it in a sort of dream. For the time it is a mere perceiving thing. In neither case is there a trace of voluntary character.†

Shelley's political views, he found, had likewise been the "effervescence of his peculiar nature." Love of liberty was natural to the primitive. And when this mind of simple structure had suffered impact with tragic reality, it had found itself driven to self-portrayal and to the repetition of its own grievances against the world. The tragedy of its own maladjusted life had been turned to unreasoning condemnation

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* Pp. 86-7.
† Pp. 88-89.

of social institutions; the abstract imagination had set up "arbitrary monstrosities or 'equality' and 'love,' which never will be realised among the children of men," and been driven to the delineation of its own dreams, and to the recounting of its own pathetic collisions with social reality.

Upon this hypothesis, Bagehot proceeded to the discovery of the reflection in Shelley's poetry of the events of his life, checking his conclusions as far as possible by his own admittedly incomplete knowledge of the poet's tragic career. Thus, "Autumn, a Dirge" (from the **Posthumous Poems** of 1824) and "a hundred other similar passages allude to the death of his first wife."* Bagehot related the story of the tragedy as he knew it, including the rumor of Shelley's madness. This led him, in the effort to support his theory, into unquestionable error: he supposed that the madman in **Julian and Maddalo** was a self-portrait of the poet. We know, of course, that Julian was Shelley, Maddalo Byron, and the madman "in some degree a painting from nature, but, with respect to time and place, ideal."† The "painting from nature" was certainly not wholly self-portraiture, any more than Shakespeare's murderers are Shakespeare. The presence in the poem of another perfectly sane person who is known to have represented Shelley is adequate evidence.

But Bagehot was satisfied, and quoted at length from the poem, and found the story "deeply illustrative" of the poet's character.

> It shows how the impulsive temperament, not definitely intending evil, is hurried forward, so to say, **over** actions and crimes which would seem to indicate deep depravity — which would do so in ordinary human nature, but which do not indicate it in anything like the same degree of guilt. Driven by singular passion across a tainted region, it retains no taint; on a sudden it passes through evil ,but preserves its purity. So curious is this character, that a record of its actions may read like a libel on its life.‡

The same story suggested to the critic that a more complex character might perhaps be requisite for the possession of the highest type of love. "Passion, to be enduring, must be manysided."** And thus all the women of his poems had been represented by Shelley as single and simple natures, possessing an appeal to that aspect of love alone which the impulsive poet knew.

> Every one of his poems almost has a lady whose arms are white, whose mind is sympathising, and whose soul is beautiful. She has many names — Cythna, Asia, Emily; but these are only external disguises; she is indubitably the same person, for her character never varies. No character can be simpler. She is described as the ideal object of love in its most simple and elemental form; the pure object of the essential passion. . . . There is not the ever-varying grace, the ever-changing expression of the unchanging charm, that alone can attract for all time the shifting moods of a various and mutable nature.††

The desideratum, for Bagehot, would seem to have been truth to the life represented in the more innocuous Victorian novels. He would have reduced Asia, a spiritual essence, and Emilia, the portrait of an apparently realized ideal, to the mold of the orthodox heroine, endowed in the interests of public morality with the requisite repertory of charms for maintaining the fidelity of the philandering husband to the end of the last chapter. It was legitimate to observe that Shelley's ladies were "unreal"; it was absurd to imply that they should have been otherwise, and to dictate to the poet his proper medium, method, and subject.

Quite naturally, Shelley was judged by this critic a failure in his longer poems and successful only in lyric fragments, the products of momentary and exalted inspirations. It was a mistake for Shelley to have attempted long and ambitious works, said Bagehot, and quoted Goethe's warning to Eckerman on the subject of long poems. But Shelley had not known this saving and authoritative dictum.

> He was ever labouring at long poems: but he has scarcely left one which, as a whole, is worthy of him; you can point to none and say, This is Shelley.‡‡

Among the "fine fragments, casual expressions of single inspirations," Bagehot held that he had written "some that are nearly, and one or two, perhaps that are quite perfect." Relating this fact to his favorite theory, he found that

> The very same isolation and suddenness of impulse which rendered him unfit for the composition of great works, rendered him peculiarly fit to pour forth on a sudden the intense essence of peculiar feeling 'in profuse strains of unpremeditated art.'***

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* P. 91.
† Shelley's letter to Hunt, August 15, 1819, Cambridge edition, p. 151.
‡ Bagehot, p. 96.
** P. 97.
†† P. 97.
‡‡ P. 98.
*** P. 98.

Whereupon he quoted Macaulay's application to Shelley of the words "bard" and "inspiration," and in his turn applied to Shelley's art and mind the poet's own lines on the skylark, with the comment that "unearthly beings," introduced by most poets to express "peculiar removed essences of lyrical rapture," were commonly failures, whereas in Shelley they were "almost universally successful."

These moments of exaltation and rapture, Bagehot revealed, had been commonly short-lived with Shelley, and had been followed by attacks of despondency, marked by the failing of ecstasy and the descent to despair at the conclusion of many a lyric. This he thought peculiarly natural to the temperament of Shelley.

> His dreams of reform, of a world which was to be, called up the imaginative ecstasy: his soul bounded forward into the future; but it is not possible even to the most abstracted and excited mind to place its happiness in the expected realisation of impossible schemes, and yet not occasionally be uncertain of those schemes. . . . It is characteristic of Shelley, that at the end of his most rapturous and sanguine lyrics there intrudes the "cold consciousness of this world."*

The measure of Shelley's highest success as a poet was further restricted by the writer when he divided lyric poems between the two types of "human" and "abstract" and stated that Shelley's peculiar excellence appeared only in poems of the latter class. The field of the former type — "the natural life, passions, and actions of real men" — had been alien to the mind of the ethereal poet; whereas the force of the primitive passion of love, dissipated and reduced in the cases of most men by constantly renewed contacts with the external universe, had been focussed by Shelley to a mad intensity, transcending and contradicting the very facts of existence. The **Epipsychidion** was the voice of such a love as this — "dizzy, bewildering, and bewildered . . . a fiction founded on fact . . . inconsistent with the inevitable conditions of ordinary existence."† Thus, it seemed to Bagehot most strange that Shelley, the star-dweller, should have taken as great an interest as he did in the Bible "as a composition." His peculiar religious views made this taste all the more unaccountable. For the Bible was a book of real life, a comprehensive record of the vicissitudes of mundane experience.

> He [Shelley] is the least biblical of poets. The whole, inevitable, essential conditions of real life — the whole of its plain, natural joys and sorrows — are described in the Jewish literature as they are described nowhere else.‡

Of the ungloved handling of raw and ineluctable human realities, properly to be expected of a poet interested in the actual lives of men, the writer found that Shelley had been quite oblivious.

> The essential feelings he hoped to change; the eternal facts he struggled to remove. Nothing in human life to him was inevitable or fixed; he fancied he could alter it all. His sphere is the 'unconditioned'; he floats away into an imaginary Elysium or an expected Utopia; beautiful and excellent, of course, but having nothing in common with the absolute laws of the present world. . . . Shelley describes the universe. He rushes away among the stars. . . . His theme is the vast, the infinite, the immeasurable. . . . Where it can, his genius soars from the concrete and real into the unknown, the indefinite, and the void.**

Such a being, thought Bagehot quite naturally, must necessarily have been deficient in the quality of persuasive eloquence, the reasoned and plotted appeal that would cause men to listen and move them to follow.

The essay concluded with an application to Shelley of Macaulay's statement that this poet, more than most, seemed to possess certain of the qualities of the great poets of antiquity. The first of two such qualities seen by Bagehot in Shelley was his possession of a classical rather than a romantic imagination; the second had to do with Shelley's style.

The discussion of the first of these qualities began with an attempt to distinguish between fancy and imagination. Imagination was thought the "creative act"; fancy, the "decorative process." The two were felt to be "often related as a beginning to an end." A flash of the godlike in us brings, we know not how, "a new image, form, idea." Straightway what we call fancy begins its work ,in the accession of "a large number of accessory and auxiliary ideas" which "seem to grow or accumulate insensibly, casually, and without our intentional effort; the bare primitive form attracts a clothing of delicate materials — an adornment not altering its essences, but enhancing its effect."

> An exquisite delicacy in appropriating fitting accessories is as much the characteristic excellence of a fanciful mind, as the possession of large, simple, bold ideas is of an imaginative one. The last is immediate; the first

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* Pp. 100-101.
† P. 102.
‡ P. 102.

> comes minute by minute. The distinction is like what one fancies between sculpture and painting. If we look at a delicate statue — a Venus or Juno — it does not suggest any slow, elaborate process . . . it seems a simple fact; we look, and require no account of it; it exists. The greatest painting suggests, not only a creative act, but a decorative process: day by day there was something new; we could watch the tints laid on, the dresses tinged, the perspective growing and growing. There is something statuesque about the imagination; there is the gradual complexity of painting in the most exquisite productions of the fancy.*

This distinction seemed to Bagehot almost identical with the distinction between modern and classical literature.

> The characteristic of the classical literature is the simplicity with which the imagination appears in it; that of modern literature is the profusion with which the most varied adornments of the accessory fancy are thrown and lavished upon it.†

As a fitting instance of the decorative poetry of fancy, Bagehot quoted from Keats's **Ode on a Grecian Urn** — the very antithesis of the "imaginative bareness" of the classic Greeks. Every rift, to use the well-remembered words of Keats to Shelley, was loaded with ore. And this trait seemed to indicate for Bagehot an adequate definition of the romanticism in the poetry of his own time.

> And it is this warmth of circumstance — this profusion of interesting detail — which has caused the name 'romantic' to be perseveringly applied to modern literature.‡

But Shelley's poetry was essentially classical; "his excellence in the abstract lyric is almost another phrase for the simplicity of his impulsive imagination." And this was adequately illustrated by a comparison of quoted passages from Keats's **Ode to the Nightingale** and Shelley's **Skylark.**

Shelley was seen, however, as a fanciful poet in another sense of the word.

> Besides the use of the word 'fancy' to denote the power which adorns and amplifies the product of the primitive imagination, we also employ it to denote the weaker exercise of the faculty which itself creates those elementary products. . . . From his habitual choice of slight and airy subjects, Shelley may be called a fanciful, as opposed to an imaginative, poet; from his bare delineations of great objects, his keen expression of distinct impulses, he should be termed an imaginative, rather than a fanciful one.**

This interesting combination of traits, Bagehot accounted for in part by a sort of incapacity in Shelley for apprehending through the medium of the body the world of the senses. Thus Shelley had sung forever an abstract beauty; whereas Keats, in a different fashion responsive to the world, had told over the sensuous delights of an earthly paradise.

Finally, the second trait possessed in common by Shelley and the ancient immortals was characterized as a peculiarly intellectual quality of style. Even upon the heights of ecstatic inspiration the mind of the poet had been keenly at work.

> So in his writings; over the most intense excitement, the grandest objects, the keenest agony, the most buoyant joy, he throws an air of subtle mind. His language is minutely and acutely searching; at the dizziest height of meaning the keenness of the words is greatest. As in mania, so in his descriptions of it, the acuteness of the mind seems to survive the mind itself. . . . In the wildest of ecstasies his self-anatomising intellect is equal to itself.††

Walter Bagehot was a realist by temperament, a man of the busy and substantial earth. He was economist, financier, political philosopher, rationalist. He was, to a degree, impervious to sentiment, better qualified for the calm analysis of literature than for that appreciation of it which comes only through participation in its spirit. There is such a thing as creative criticism, but his discussions of poetry have justly been called critical in the analytical sense, rather than creative.‡‡ His essay on Shelley was such an analysis, written for the mind, subjecting itself to the standard, as it employs the methods, of logic. His study of Shelley thus consisted in the application of the theory that was in his mind, and the consequent drawing of conclusions.

In fact, there appeared in this essay the application to the poet and his poetry of

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* Pp. 103-4.
† P. 104.
‡ P. 106.
** Pp. 108-9.
†† P. 111.
‡‡ See George Sampson's Introduction to Bagehot's **Literary Studies,** Everyman's Library edition, p. xvi.

at least three distinct theories, and the derivation of three corresponding sets of conclusions. Bagehot used a philosophy of religion and morality, a psychological hypothesis, and a criterion of poetic art. Each of these served the double purpose of expository probing and critical testing; but the explanatory aspect was, throughout the essay, the more prominent. In outward profession at least, the study inclined to the revelation of what Shelley and his poetry were, rather than to the explicit statement of their merit as judged by the standards of the art. We therefore frequently read between the lines, to discover that Bagehot, while for the most part innocent of outspoken condemnation, weighed Shelley in the scale of logic, utility, and Victorian orthodoxy, and found him wanting; while even the Shelley enthusiast must admit that for the most part he rendered the poet his due in tribute to his imaginative genius, to his more than human endowment of high intellect and vision, and to his consistent beauty of phrase and image.

Shelley's failure to acknowledge the orthodox divinity has already been noted. His truly religious nature, and the nature of his true religion, are too well known today, or at least too well believed in, to require elaborate proof. We need only remember that it was Shelley who wrote, "There is a Power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lute is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will."* It would be unnecessary to make this point at all if Bagehot had been content to find Shelley merely unorthodox of mind; but he accused the poet of a native incapacity for any true religion, and of this charge it is only just that Shelley should be cleared.

We have seen that in the role of psychologist Bagehot revealed Shelley as a type of that character and temperament which move always upon a single impulse. We know that Shelley was in almost every sense impulsive, and we know that he had that cast of mind which thinks itself forever in the right. To this point the critic was apparently correct. Without reviewing certain mistakes and inconsistencies which resulted from his attempt to apply his theory to the last detail, we may observe that, in attributing Shelley's poetry to his passion for reform, Bagehot seems to have fallen into the error of believing that the poetry had been intended directly to correct the social abuses of the times, that it had been meant as an immediate instrument of social rehabilitation. This is an error frequently to be found in the criticisms by Shelley's contemporaries, and there in a measure to be excused; Bagehot, having come later, is less to be defended, if this was indeed his meaning. The view of the present writer — and it seems inevitable if Shelley is to be shielded from the charge of mere insanity — is that the poems, in general, were consciously written for the inspiration of the minds and souls of men, that they were meant to be the moving origin of man's progress toward spiritual, and thus toward social, perfection; that they were not the mere weapons of a temporal assault upon the abuses of the day.† Whether Shelley did succeed in bettering the soul of mankind through his verse, as Hazlitt and others are said to have believed that he did not, is another question. We are here merely defending it from condemnation as temporary and ineffectual propaganda.

As to Bagehot's applied criterion of poetic art, it is safe to agree with him in holding that Shelley's poetry was, as a rule, less loaded with decoration than that of Keats and certain other contemporary poets, and that to a corresponding extent it approached more nearly to the stripped and disciplined literature that we think of as classic. Bagehot apparently saw no contradiction of this view in his observation that Shelley had lacked the ability to maintain poetic tone and form in a way to permit the composition of successful long poems. Perfection of form is as much a part of the classical ideal as simplicity of treatment; but the essayist seemed to imply that a sense of form and an ability to maintain it throughout a long work had not been conspicuous qualities in Shelley's creative endowment. He classified Shelley among the classic poets, and denied him to the romanticists, on one count only, out of a possible many; whereas his definition of the romantic, while sound as far as it went, suffered from the same lack of logic.

The critic's finding of frequent self-delineation by the poet in his longer poems, since he specified direct and intimate self-portraiture, may be denied, for some of the poems at least. It would certainly be difficult to find in **Prometheus** and **The Cenci.** The various angels of reform in the other works usually resembled Shelley most in that very reformatory passion itself; and we may deny the general likeness to a Shelley whose nature had surely not been so idyllically simple as Bagehot represented it to have been. His statement of Shelley's motive in choosing the story of **The Cenci** — namely, that he might refute and ridicule the old — requires no further answer than is supplied by Shelley's own account of the circumstances of the choice and by Mrs. Shelley's later commentary. And we have seen that Bagehot's use of

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* "Essay on Christianity," in **Shelley's Prose in the Bodleian Manuscripts,** edited by A. H. Koszul, London, 1910, pp. 18-19.

† A similar view is expressed in one of the best modern interpretations of Shelley: "He regarded himself as the interpreter of a heavenly and consoling message. . . . He turned to poetry as to an intensely practical thing. . . . It was the best answer he knew to the eternal cry: 'What shall we do to be saved?' It was to him the chiefest of those miracles which might cure the organic disease. And his own method in poetry was completely consistent with his ideas of its healing and sustaining powers." — Campbell, **Shelley and the Unromantics,** London, 1924, pp. 287-288.

the dangerous critical method of explaining the poems by the life of the poet, and the life by the poems, led him into at least one doubtful judgment.

On the whole, we have in this essay cold-blooded analysis, logical procedure, the calm granting of virtues, and the implied discovery of faults. The writer was not a man qualified by temperament for the fullest knowledge of Shelley. He tried consistently to apply to the poet a set of hypotheses, and strained a bit at times in trying to make subject and theory coincide. He laid an interesting emphasis upon the impulsive essence of the Shelleyan poetry, and advanced an interesting mid-century view of Romanticism and of Shelley's relationship to it. He revealed a genuine intellectual interest in poetry and poet, which was not quite adequate for the comprehension of a genius that was more than intellect. On the whole, he acted the well-bred and orderly Procrustes.*

A review of the works of Medwin and Mrs. Shelley in the **Westminster Review** two years later resolved itself into a vigorous scourging of Shelley's opponents and of such social and religious abuses as those to which the poet had opposed himself.† Shelley's earlier critics came in for a share of punishment, as well as the institutions to which he had administered rebuke. The former unfairness of reviewers, the essayist thought, had passed away with the political and social order which had brought it about; but the animadversions of a sordid orthodoxy still required refutation.

> We are, we repeat, far from sympathizing in the least with Shelley's expressions [in **Queen Mab**]; but we especially abhor the tenets of his orthodox reviewers. They are far more open to the charge of blasphemy than Shelley. It is they who degrade God, and God's creatures, by representing him as the God of vengeance, and all his works vile and filthy; this glorious world as the devil's world, and all the men and women in it chosen vessels of wrath, unable to do one good deed of themselves. They call Shelley an Atheist, indeed!‡

This was followed by a furious condemnation of selfish and hypocritical preachers.

In elucidation of Shelley's politics, a picture of the times in which he lived was offered:

> . . . the nation was suffering all the distresses a long war could entail; when a Parliament of landlords enacted the Corn-laws for the benefit of their own rents; when prosecutions were rife for the most trifling offenses; when Government actually employed spies to excite starving men to violence; when "blood was on the grass like dew."

These facts tended to inspire in Shelley his passion for a better order, but also, it was thought, to force him at once into intemperance and impracticality in offering his remedies.

> Shelley, unfortunately, fancied that there was some one specific to be externally applied to the gangrene of wretchedness, and cure it at once and forever.

It was admitted, however, that there was much truth in the doctrine of perfectibility, if it should be carried into action through men's wills.

After a long digression, consisting of platitudinous remarks upon industrial improvements, Labor, and England's prosperity, Shelley's faults were enumerated: he had lacked a sufficient sense of duty, and an appreciation of the value of adversity; he had been destructive rather than constructive; he had had too slight a realization of the importance of "Labour." All this had resulted in a certain undefinable lack of solidarity in his poetry — too little attention to the goodly brick-and-mortar of British fact:

> Shelley exhibited to a remarkable degree the union of the metaphysical and the imaginative mind. Philosophy and poetry prevailed over him alternately. . . . It is from an overbalance of philosophy that there is such a want of concreteness in his poems. He was for ever looking at things in a metaphysical point of view, projecting himself into Time and Space; regarding this earth as a ball, with its blue robe of air,
>
> "As she dances about the sun,"
>
> instead of parcelled into rich farms and sprinkled with towns, and solid three and four-storied houses, and walls fourteen inches thick, tenanted by Kit Slys, Shylocks, Iagos, Falstaffs, and the whole company of humanity, who play on alternate nights and days the tragedy and the comedy of life.**

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* For an opposite view of the matter of Shelley's "impulsive" nature, see Thornton Hunt's "Shelley—By One Who Knew Him," in the **Atlantic Monthly**, February, 1863. Reprinted in Edmund Blunden's **Shelley and Keats as They Struck Their Contemporaries**, Beaumont Press, 1925, pp. 11-53.

† **Westminster Review**, 1858, Vol. 69 (XIII).

‡ P. 110.

** Pp. 120-121.

Shelley's virtue as a poet, however, was identified with the fact that in a certain measure he had interpreted his age:

> Every true artist — whether by poetry, or painting, or architecture, it matters not — gives us the great questions of the day, with his attempted solution of them. Hence is it that Shelley is really a poet, because in his verse he truly sympathized with the wants of the day.*

Finally, it was thought, and sadly recorded, that Shelley had lacked that perfecting tranquillity which marks all poetry of the highest rank, and that he had been ill fitted for literary or practical success. But he had been a Martyr — he had renewed men's faith in human nature; and to do it he had given up (and this was the essayist's most powerful plea) an income of ten thousand a year.

For all the good will of its author, this was as strange and incongruous a test as had ever been applied to Shelley's poetry. The **Westminster Review** was an organ of radical social philosophers: it had made its discussion of Shelley's religion an occasion for attack, however justified, upon the morose theology of original sin and inherent wickedness; its discussion of his politics, a peg upon which to hang deprecation of the plutocratic past and glorification of the prosperous and democratic present; and its discourse upon his poetry, a definition of that divine art in terms of industrial materialism and blatant national practicality.

It is hardly necessary to observe that there entered into this interpretation of the poet certain invalidating influences of the temper of the times, not unanalogous to those of which the essayist had complained in his reflections upon Shelley's own generation of reviewers; it is equally obvious that this critic saw in Shelley chiefly his early, specific, destructive symbols of reform, without finding in them, or in the later works, the representation of that larger spirit of idealistic beneficence of which even Shelley's errors had been most eloquent. The essay propounded a critical standard and a definition of the artist; but both of these criteria were the effects of the mood of England's industrial revolution and of her new and unElizabethan nationalism. At best, they were suitable only for the evaluation of poetic realism and concrete social philosophy; in their application to his abstract poetry the principal relationship of Shelley to his times, and to later times, was wholly lost. The criticism is chiefly notable as having been singularly isolated in its insistence that social institutions were not perfect, and that Shelley, even in his most intemperate mood, had had a real evil to attack; other critics had treated the revered stabilities of church and state as too sacred either for Shelley's anathema or for their own moderate rebukes. And finally, the essay is uniquely suggestive in that it leaves us wondering what sort of poetry a man like Shelley would have made of walls fourteen inches thick.

In 1858 appeared, apparently in advance of Hogg's **Life**, a two-volume biography of Shelley by Charles S. Middleton,† which, when it came to review, was received by the **North British Critic**‡ with a contempt scarcely greater than it deserved, even though the attitude of the reviewer seemed in part the result of a dislike of Shelley equal to his dislike of the biography itself. Middleton's book, as he said, had nothing to recommend it, other than an obvious sincerity of purpose. It was a wordy, sentimental effusion, full of bad grammar, spongy rhetoric, absurd omissions of unconventional facts, windy and superficial ecstasies, and shameless plagiarisms. Middleton was smitten with the "Eternal Child"; he excused Shelley's doctrines as mere human errors on the part of a man otherwise nearly perfect; his "criticism" consisted chiefly in a gesture toward heaven and the exclamation, "How beautiful!" For most of his intelligent comments on the poems he was indebted to Leigh Hunt and Mrs. Shelley, whose writings he did not scruple to use with the most general acknowledgments, or with none.

The Wandering Jew Middleton found worthy of comment only as a literary curiosity. The best part of the poem, however, he claimed for Shelley, taking Medwin's complaisant admission at its word. **Zastrozzi** interested him chiefly as evidence of the author's orthodox religious views at the time of writing, for he was much interested in representing Shelley as perfect in the essential virtues of the Christian spirit. Shelley's earlier writings, however, he found on the whole unpromising, in proportion to the genius which later evinced itself.

Queen Mab, nevertheless, received a lengthy commentary.** This, Middleton was pleased to conjecture, was, in its original state, merely a very beautiful and highly fanciful poem which had grown out of Shelley's intense interest in dreams. After Shelley's unfortunate experiences at Oxford, it had unluckily been revised and made into a wholesale attack upon social usages; later revisions had not always been happy ones, though intended to obliterate the most objectionable passages; the poem had been repudiated by the author after he had come to years of discretion. It had never been properly published, and therefore should never have become the occasion of public attacks upon the poet. In any case, the offensive element in its content was not the product of the author's "calm judgment," but rather of his "ungoverned

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* P. 121.

† **Shelley and His Writings**, by Charles S. Middleton, London, Newby, 1858. Two volumes.

‡ February, 1861, Volume XXXIV (American edition), pp. 18-34. The article was entitled, "Shelley and His Recent Biographers."

** Middleton, Vol. I, Ch. XXV.

impetuosity"; and the poem unquestionably had marked the arrival of a great poet, and should therefore have been received with rejoicing rather than with critical recrimination.

Middleton's calibre as a critic may be illustrated here by choice passages from the commentary in which he welcomed the advent of genius and, at the same time, deprecated the enmity of that genius toward the social fabric. **Queen Mab** he called

> . . . a poem which for sublimity of thought and purity of diction stands pre-eminent among the early efforts of genius. Surveying it with a calm and dispassionate soul, untrammeled by those petty jealousies of religious or political prejudices, we see not sufficient to have called forth that venom and bitter animosity with which its author was assailed on its first appearance.
>
> We acknowledge at once the vigorous hand of dawning genius of the highest cast, whose marvellous powers already discover themselves in flashes of splendid thought, which occasionally strike out from a confused and ill-digested conception clouded with nebulous light, such as may in due season break up and resolve itself into bright creations and starry systems.
>
> We are delighted and affected with his gorgeous imagery and the purity of his aspirations, though we may often stop to smile at the impotent rage with which his unskilful hand wields the dangerous weapons of nonconformity.
>
> While we sometimes regret the unmeaning epithets and sallies to which his ungoverned impetuosity, rather than his calm judgment, blindly and unintentionally hurries him, we see every reason to rejoice over the advent of a great poet, a bold and independent thinker, whose every impulse is against oppression; whose burning and impassioned heart, intensely thrilling with the highest and noblest sentiments of moral beauty, responds to the best, the holiest wishes of humanity.
>
> As regards the tendency of this poem, probably no one ever changed his opinions from reading Queen Mab; and while it is dignified with the epithet "philosophical," it can be considered neither metaphysical nor theological, neither political nor ethical, neither for excess nor restraint, but a strange medley of all things, which seems to be against all things, supplying texts both for friends and foes, and on the surface appearing to advocate as much good as evil, as much evil as good.
>
> We are impressed only with the brilliant array of splendid images, with the nobleness, the purity, the goodness of intentions, which are thwarted by the same hand that advances them, with the shortcomings of youth, which riper years may expand, which maturer judgment may embody and grasp, and direct with strength and decision towards great and glorious ends; and, lastly, with the chafings of an irritated and misunderstood nature, which time will rectify, which the inherent qualities of his own heart is sure in the end to repudiate.*

Thus Middleton gloried in the power of thought made manifest by Shelley in this early work, the while he pronounced the results of that thought invalid and impotent; thus he rejoiced in the "beauties" of the poetry while closing eyes and mind to the burden of their message. This would have seemed to Shelley's contemporaries a strange commentary upon a poem which, while taken as seriously as Middleton later took it, struck venomously at the vitals of society.

Of **Alastor** he wrote:

> Alastor is but the portraiture of his own spiritual existence, reflected in the light of poetry: and for the time being we dwell with him in all things spiritual, while he stands to us the impersonation of an ideal love, seeking repose from that passion on which he nourishes, and which consumes him, in the love of all things animate and inanimate, all things beautiful and good; pouring the beauty of his own soul over all things visible, and gathering its invisible essence back unto himself.
>
> But vivid and gorgeous as is the imagery, splendid as a whole, minute and perfect in all its detail as is the poem itself, its immediate tendency is to blind with excess of light, to dazzle rather than to please, to excite rather than to satisfy; suggesting eternal restlessness but no repose — the restlessness of his own existence, the bewilderment of his own soaring fancy, the excitement of his own heart.

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* Vol. I, pp. 259-264.

> But the more intimate we become with it, the more its excellencies grow upon us, the more we enter into the spirit of the poet's conception, till at length we are lifted up, as it were, above ourselves, into the very heaven of his thoughts, breathing in a purer and brighter atmosphere of beauty and love — till its apparent inequalities soften down, and its bold contrasts of brilliant sunlight and dim shadow blend and harmonise; but there is a tone of infinite sadness pervading the whole, springing, as it were, out of the hopeless aspiration of Alastor, after that purity and perfection which is not akin to earth, and therefore utterly beyond him.
>
> For purity of thought and beauty of diction, as well as for exquisite harmony of versification, there is scarcely anything to surpass, and few things to equal, this poem in the whole range of English poetry.*

It is hardly necessary to point out that "Alastor" was neither the poet in the poem, nor, himself, an embodiment of "an ideal love"; or to observe that the criticism contained nothing but enthusiastic verbiage of the loosest kind.

Middleton's understanding of the ideas of Shelley for social regeneration was of the haziest, but he did grasp the poet's persistent faith in the perfectibility of man; and he was correct in his opinion that Shelley's faith in the immediate renovation of the earth had cooled in the face of successive disillusionments. He was less subtle in jumping at the conclusion, so easy for those who prided themselves upon their practicality, that Shelley's Utopia was permanently impossible. And he departed farther from the probable truth in his statement that Shelley conceived of aspiration toward the perfect good as more important than its achievement.

> The splendid visions of purity and perfect happiness which the poet and the philosopher love to dream over, may sometimes be dimly shadowed forth in himself; but they present to us a state of existence which communities may never attain to. . . . but no one knew better than Shelley that to thirst after the unattainable was the surest means of arriving at the highest happiness which man is capable of, and which, in the narrow sphere of his endeavours, he is permitted to enjoy.†

In keeping with his incomplete comprehension of the poet's aims, Middleton found **The Revolt of Islam** not only inferior to Shelley's best, but also obscure. He thought it beautiful, exalted, harmonious, but of uncertain purpose.

> Never, perhaps, did beings of more perfect purity and loveliness emanate from poet's brain than Laon and Cythna. They are altogether too spiritual, too unearthly, to be true to human nature, though they are such as Shelley ever loved to paint. But, as regards the general design of the poem, its ultimate aim, or the means of accomplishing it, it must be allowed that it is wrapped in considerable obscurity; and here it is the poet fails.

By his attempt to reduce this poem to the criterion of ordinary, objective truth-to-nature, and his failure, presumably after reading the poem and Shelley's explicit preface, to see the aim of the writer, Middleton proved himself congenitally unqualified to function as critic of this or any other poetry.

In the case of **Prometheus Unbound** his method of presentation was expository and illustrative. Prompted by Shelley's introduction, he perceived the significance of the principal characters and the difference between Shelley's treatment of the myth and that of Aeschylus. He detected here again the presence of the favorite idea of perfectibility; he found that to follow Shelley in the thin atmosphere of this cosmic lyric was an intense strain on the imagination; but he must have startled other readers of the poem by finding here more of concrete and earthly reality than in the earlier poems.

> Hitherto the creations of his fancy had been scarcely more than beautiful exhalations, that filled the mind with a vague sense of loveliness, without leaving any exactly defined impression behind them.
>
> In these [**The Cenci** and — **Prometheus Unbound!**] the lifeblood of reality circulates more freely, and we are presented with ideas that may be grasped and fathomed.‡
>
> At this period of his life the cardinal point of his system was the same as he had advocated with such earnest enthusiasm in his earlier youth. His

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* Vol I, pp. 314-317.
† Vol. II, pp. 92-93.
‡ Vol. II, p. 166.

vague and dreamy abstractions, however, were now reduced to something more real and tangible.*

Though it was no adequate statement of the idea, this may have been intended to mean that Middleton found in the **Prometheus** a more definite allegory of perfectibility than, for example, in **The Revolt of Islam.** But it is not inconceivable that, by a process of post-factum rationalization, he was tracing that very evolution toward mastery of the medium, and toward the lucid embodiment in words of shadowy thought, which he thought **should** mark the growth of the poetic mind.

The Cenci, Shelley's use of the subject of which Middleton defended by convenient classical precedent, he thought, on the whole, a successful composition (his language was hardly more memorable and vigorous than this); but, while admitting Shelley's great skill in the analysis of character and in the mechanics of dramatic form, he deplored his **too explicit** treatment of the unspeakable theme that moved the tragic action, and the consequent prominence given to the person of Beatrice! While defending the subject, he would have suppressed its dramatic essence; while admitting that Beatrice was the principal and pivotal person, he would have had her reduced to the role of a tragic shadow — out of the spotlight. And he would have had the awful cause of her actions reserved for a final and climactic revelation: an excuse and an end-piece, laid away where it could do least damage to susceptible audiences. This in the face of Shelley's most delicate ordering of the matter:

> . . . in the particular instance of Beatrice, a maturer judgment would have suggested the propriety of leaving much to the imagination of his auditors that he has endeavoured to pourtray. . . .
>
> He should endeavour to keep her for ever present to the minds of his audience; but personally she should occupy the least prominent position in the action; and the terrible provocation that led her to participate in the death of Cenci should appear rather at the last in her exculpation than be made a prominent feature in the drama.
>
> Here I consider it is that Shelley has failed to render this a great acting drama. The commission of a revolting crime, and its effects upon the mind of Beatrice are too much dwelt upon. . . . She often appears at too great a length to probe her own heart, and to lay bare the wounds inflicted on it, which it had been much better to suggest to an audience through the medium of others than to realize in her own person.*

Those who know the technique of great English tragedy (and Shelley had been a diligent student of the Elizabethan masters, as many qualities in **The Cenci** testify) will perceive how Middleton laid the ax to the root of authentic drama in the unacknowledged name of mid-Victorian prudery.

For the rest, Middleton had merely meaningless enthusiasm and inane compliment. The **Skylark** he thought "perfect" — enough, in itself, to have assured immortality for its creator; the odes to Liberty and to Naples were "glorious" and "above all praise"; **The Sensitive Plant** was a "poem of exquisite beauty," although it contained ideas that imposed too great a strain upon mortal comprehension, such as the conception that love, beauty, and delight never die or change. **Adonais** contained "some of Shelley's most splendid idealisms . . . in their maturest form"; naturally Middleton was struck especially by the passages referring to the author himself, which he was pleased to regard as prophetic.

But, as he approached the climax of his work, the biographer was inspired with a final spark of penetrating perception, if a feeble and glimmering one. The **Epipsychidion** evoked this passage of interpretation:

> To transmute everything into spirit is the peculiar characteristic of Shelley's genius; for ever grasping after ideal purity and perfection, his habit of thought led him to consider every object in the universe only as so many manifestations of the spiritual . . . the contemplation he most delighted in was that of an all-pure and perfect love . . . the unquenchable desire it produced in him tended more than anything else to spiritualize his nature. . . . In this poem he exalts a beautiful reality into the perfection of his ideal, painting her in such ethereal colours that she becomes transfigured in our presence, and gifting her with such qualities as belong rather to a seraph than to mortal maiden. . . . It is the communion of soul with soul, the lofty aspiration of that which is immortal in one nature after that which is immortal and worshipful in another; the actual is passed over in the endeavour to grasp the Ideal, till at length the enthusiasm of the imagination is wrought to the highest, and he contemplates in her an image of the supreme Beauty which, according to his divine teacher, is the perfection of Love.†

The divine teacher was Plato, and Middleton understood Shelley's fragment **On Love** better than he understood the workings of the poet's mind in the creation of less literal compositions. But he was here led to an approximation of the truth, and ventured a more than usually penetrating, though perhaps not strictly original,

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* Pp. 179-181.

† Vol. II, pp. 267-269.

commentary upon the poem. For the most part he was content with bombastic eulogy, lengthy quotation from the poems which he delighted to honor, and generalized exposition. He chose, of course, the obvious poems for discussion, and his almost universal superlative allows us to find in his book little in the way of comparative evaluation. It is worthy of note that the **Ode to the West Wind** found no place in his anthology of the poet's masterpieces; this poem had been so generally neglected by earlier critics that perhaps Middleton had no one to set him on the trail.

The keys to Middleton were critical incompetence and temporal remoteness from the man of whom he wrote. He was far enough removed from the second decade of the century to treat the poet's iconoclastic traits with leniency, and yet too blinded by maudlin enthusiasm to see Shelley except as a mighty poet "pinnacled dim in the intense inane." He should be numbered among the devotees of the legend of the "Eternal Child," whose response was an uncritical enthusiasm.

Perhaps because of the sentimental glorification of Shelley by such proponents of the legend, his ideas came at this time under as severe, if not as immoderately abusive, a disapproval as they had had from his contemporaries. In review of Middleton's book a writer in **Chambers's Journal** called attention to the legendary aspect which the poet had assumed, and suggested that there were two myths — one representing him as an angel, the other as a demon. This reviewer preferred to hold his discriminating way between the two extremes. He regarded Shelley as a vain and sensitive person who would have taken up any detestable opinion for the sake of notoriety and as a means of defending his own conscious weakness, and who had thus been no sound, nor even serious, philosopher, but a purveyor of the spectacular.

> Any man, with a man's brains in his head, might have perceived that Shelley was a mad boy, playing with dangerous opinions, because it excited the world's attention. He was not a philosopher launching forth a new system to influence the reasonings and the thoughts of mankind forever; but a young man of vivid imagination, rich fancy, and distorted intellect, blowing gorgeous bubbles for their entertainment. He had an instrument at his command which would occasionally discourse most excellent music, but suddenly fly off into sharps and discords, grating most harshly upon the ear. In the way of opinion, there is nothing whatever that is new in Shelley. He had groped among the ruins of the past, and picked up a number of strange ideas, which he draped fantastically after the modern fashion.*

The reviewer for the **Eclectic Review** was somewhat more ironical in his rejection of Shelley's philosophy. He was quite unable to separate the man from the poet in his interpretation, and both were made to suffer at his hands. More the peevish moralist than the legitimate critic, he reviewed the poet's life with the recital of every possible distasteful anecdote, and, in his discourse on the poetry, took no pains to separate moral from literary judgments.

It was typical of his attitude that he should have given much attention to the half-recanted **Queen Mab**:

> Materials for his "Queen Mab" grew under his hand during this period, which afterward expanded in that dreary poem into an attack upon everything which society holds dear; the domestic constitution, the supremacy of law, and revealed religion. It needs no further characterization; it is the embodied spleen of an Ishmael — the futile "Raze it, Raze it," of an infatuated Samson, which destroys self more effectually than the foe. Shelley meant it for lava, but it turned out nothing more poetical than bile.†

Alastor was favored as containing a minimum of propaganda:

> The poem of "Alastor," the production of his twenty-fifth year, will bear comparison with any other that dropped from his pen, for the music of its rhythm, the force of its expression, and the dreamy mysticism of its strain.‡

The Revolt of Islam, however, was of "pernicious character." Though it contained some of the finest English verse, it was

> made up of a loud shriek of denunciation against all the actual or possible tyrannies of mankind, relieved by musical wails of more plaintive character — the whole consisting of neither more nor less than a defensive pleading in the Spenserian stanza of boys that dislike being flogged or fagged at school, and of men that prefer concubinage, with license of change, to marriage, which forbids it.**

There was only the briefest mention of **Prometheus Unbound,** the **Euganean Hills,** the "odious subject" of **The Cenci,** and the **Skylark,** though the last was a favorite of the reviewer. The fact that Shelley wrote Keats only one letter upon his arrival in Italy, together with the self-portrait which the poem contained, spoiled

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* **Chambers's Journal,** 1858, Vol. 9. See pp. 148-151.
† **Eclectic Review,** 1858, Vol. 107 (Sixth Series, III), pp. 330-331.
‡ Ibid., p. 333.
** Ibid., p. 334.

Adonais for this critic. He thought the portrait its most interesting passage, but found the whole "infinitely short of the deep pathos of 'In Memoriam'." The egotism of the poet overcame, for him, any greater merit in the poem. "The mourner weeping over the dead is lost in the misanthrope bewailing himself."

> We cannot but find serious fault with the perpetual portraiture of himself which makes his more striking poems monotonous repetitions of an unattractive photograph.*

The opinions of Moir were adopted in making summary of the subject, especially in connection with the negation and emptiness of Shelley's philosophy.

> His poetry made his philosophy weak — his philosophy made his poetry sour, like whigged milk.

An intermittent charm was found in the longer poems, but also a deficiency in ultimate artistic effect.

> All the longer poems of the bard, including therein his "Revolt of Islam," "Queen Mab," "Hellas," and the "Prometheus Unbound," we regard as poetical failures. We do not, of course, mean that there is not much of a high order of poetry in each of these pieces, but that in no one of them is any definite impression made upon the reader, except that of an occasional admiration of the writer's powers. . . . We do not include "The Cenci" . . . because, as a work of art, this melancholy tragedy does not so entirely fail of its end.

The short poems were said to exhibit his greatest excellence; the critic thought the "Hymn to Pan" one of the best of these "imaginative minor strains," and was among the few writers who justly chose the **West Wind** as of the very finest in its kind. For the rest, a quotation from Moir, the opinion that the poet's biography would be the best antidote to his beliefs, and the characterization of his drowning as a "divine Nemesis," summed up the tale.

It is evident, thus, that controversy over Shelley had not died with the passing of his own day. Just as the poet's provocative utterances had elicited outspoken condemnation in his own time, so those well-remembered doctrines, together with reaction against the beatification of their author, evoked the moral censorship anew. It would seem that the level of the general reviews had not greatly altered in those forty years.

It is probable, also, that the peculiar moral conservatism of Scottish critics, seen at its extreme in **Hogg's Instructor** and at its most efficient in D. M. Moir, was exerting a considerable influence in the period. Likewise, the objective quality of much of Tennyson's most popular and most "poetic" work may have given rise, in its moulding of critical standards, to the reaction against that extreme Romanticist "sensibility" which was expressed in Shelley's poignant self-revelations. But most significant of all, perhaps, is the fact that Shelley's genius had been essentially un-English; social revolt, transcendental philosophy, and Latin emotionalism were alike uncomfortable to the reticent and conservative ethos of the British. There is still that in the Englishman which cannot long and sympathetically abide a man who publicly falls upon the thorns of life and bleeds.

The incongruity of certain propagandist passages in Shelley's best poems may be admitted; the accusation of spectacular vanity has already been dealt with in the discussion of earlier writers, as has the fallacy of confusing the man with the poetry. The objection to the intimate personal passages may be regarded, in connection with this last review, as in part the result of an unfortunate bias and in part the effect of a constitutional British attitude, abetted by the peculiar temper of the mid-century. But the essay may be thought to have indicated not too unjustly several of those qualities — propagandist and personal — in which the poet did at times transgress the boundaries of taste and aesthetic fitness.

Finally, it may be observed that the distinction between matter of poetry and matter of philosophy was insisted upon by certain critics until the very end of the period in question.

In the same year the renewed moral opposition was combined with the beginnings of that sort of textual criticism which has to do with the tracing of specific similarities between writers in the same genre. Somewhat earlier the author of an article in the **Oxford University Magazine**, already quoted, had seen remarkable parallelisms between Shelley's lines and those of Robert Montgomery; a few years later Swinburne was to take up the question of textual scholarship.† In this year the scrutiny of the text produced a list, signed by D. F. Mac-Carthy, of striking parallelisms between Shelley and Crashaw. These were said to be likenesses "in structure, sentiment, and occasionally in expression," but the lines were not very fortunately chosen. It was thought almost certain that Shelley had not known Crashaw, and that the parallel passages had arisen out of an essential similarity of genius with genius. Both men, it was remarked, had sacrificed self for truth. But here the discussion turned from text to morals:

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* Ibid., p. 348.

† See his **Notes on the Text of Shelley** (1869), in **Essays and Studies.**

> Fortunately, in Crashaw's case, Truth and Faith were synonymous; unhappily with Shelley the abnegation of Faith seemed to be of more importance than the reception of any tangible or intelligible substitute.*

Furthermore, the moral issue seems to have had a decided effect upon the convincing qualities of the parallel passages; for, in reply to the original article, one who signed himself "A. A. W." denied their analogy and extended his commentary to a proof that Shelley could not have been inherently similar to a pure religious poet:

> Had his genius been under more wholesome control, and his tastes, ethical and social, been more carefully cultivated, he might have deserved to stand on Parnassus, to which some of the less discriminating of his admirers have attempted to elevate him: but a poet who made atheism his boast, incest the favorite subject of his muse, and a defiance of the ordinary regulations of civilised society the rule, rather than the exception, of his life, could never have become a great poet in the best sense of the term.†

Of the mid-century books about Shelley which evoked much of the periodical criticism of that time the most authentic was the **Shelley Memorials,**‡ edited by Lady Jane Shelley in 1859. Without being pointedly argumentative, this book was intended to correct certain false impressions which the preceding biographies were said by the Shelley family to have propagated. By dignified statement, and by the profuse inclusion of relevant letters, Shelley was cleared of any blame for the fate of Harriet, and of any suspicion in the matter of Clare Clairmont and the Italian residence. While disclaiming the responsibilities and aims of elaborate biography, Lady Shelley presented a very simple, brief, and pleasing account of Shelley's life, which was supplemented by a chapter on Mrs. Shelley, substantial quotations from her journal, and Shelley's **Essay on Christianity**, there printed for the first time.

The critical portion was in keeping with the purpose of the book. It consisted of incidental passages in the midst of condensed narrative, passages which occurred as the principal poems were mentioned, one by one, in that account. These passages were descriptive rather than analytical; they attempted to characterize the chief works of the poet rather than to treat his poetry or philosophy as wholes. They calmly assumed Shelley's genius and high rank, and implied that his works were then already recognized as great; it was clear that Lady Shelley sought chiefly to clear Shelley's memory of calumny, and regarded his poetry as too well established to stand in much need of an argumentative and extensive critique. This critical material, therefore, should be regarded as in many points unlike the periodical commentaries of the time which it may be thought to have occasioned; it constituted, also, a less complete and systematic discussion of the poet than many of the reviews that followed it. The book served the cause of Shelley rather by putting on record, from documents possessed by the family, certain authoritative utterances upon his life and character than by presenting the ultimate biography or the final critique.

Queen Mab necessarily brought up the question of Shelley's atheism, and Lady Shelley's verdict was right as far as it went.

> The more exalted Platonical speculations of his later life naturally made Shelley discontented with the somewhat cold, though qualified, materialism of **Queen Mab.** But it is a mistake to describe that poem as utterly Atheistical in its tendency. It is rather Pantheistical; since, while it rejects the hypothesis of a creative God, it affirms the existence of "a pervading Spirit, co-eternal with the universe." Passages might be quoted from it, full of deep yet modest piety, as regarded from the author's point of view — a point which must be conceded to the believers in **any** creed. The involuntary tendency of a poet to recognise spiritual existences constantly breaks forth, and peoples the world with Fairies and Genii. The immortality of the soul, and its essential difference from the body, are likewise acknowledged — nay, even passionately enforced. But, undoubtedly, the poem and the notes are anything but orthodox. Shelley regarded the conventional religion as gross, contradictory, and tending to oppression and cruelty; and history supplied him with many dismal facts in support of that view. . . . As a literary production, **Queen Mab** will always possess interest, because of the vigorous indications it contains of an expanding genius, already haunted with images of splendour and with utterances of sonorous melody; but it cannot be denied that it sometimes betrays an adherence to that conventional style of poetry which was then passing away from our literature, and from which Shelley himself afterward widely diverged. The notes exhibit a large extent of reading; and, whatever may be thought of the doctrines enforced, no candid reader will refuse to admire the subtlety of reasoning and the mastery of style which are here evinced by a mere youth.**

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* **Notes and Queries,** 1858, Second series, Vol. 5, p. 449.
† Ibid., pp. 517-518.
‡ London; Smith, Elder and Co., 1859.
** Pp. 54-55.

Certain objections made by Godwin to the style of **The Revolt of Islam*** provided Lady Shelley with an occasion for certain general remarks about the qualities of Shelley's poetry and **The Revolt of Islam.** Godwin had formed his taste upon "the men of the Shakespearean and Miltonic era" —

> But the poetry of Shelley, excepting in so far as it was inspired by the genius of ancient Greece — was essentially modern in its character.† It mingled the impalpable suggestions of mysticism with images of exotic splendour, tropical in the heat and glory of their hues, touched with a light that seemed to dawn from some remote and supernatural future, and often dim with the too great intensity of the writer's emotions and the excessive radiance in which he robed his subtle imaginings. The practical, acute, clear mind of Godwin could not live, with any comfort to itself, in this region of ethereal, though sublime, magnificence: neither his temperament nor his intellectual habits fitted him for deriving any high degree of pleasure from a practice so opposed to his own. But Shelley has helped to make the times more poetical; and the flame-like energy and grandeur, the tumultuous passion, and the strange visionary beauty of the **Revolt of Islam** are now universally acknowledged.‡

Of the gradual modification of Shelley's impatience and animosity toward social abuses, Lady Shelley wrote — in connection with Shelley's second marriage:

> His anxiety to aid the intelligence of the less instructed, and his efforts to promote the well-being of the poorer classes of his fellow-creatures, were as vivid and as strenuous as before; yet his mind, by gradually bending to milder influences, divested itself of much of that hostile bitterness of thought and expression with which he had hitherto attacked those political and social abuses which had seemed to him to be the principal obstacles to the progressive development of mankind.**

This modification of Shelley's impetuosity we have already acknowledged as a fact, but its causes might, perhaps, have more rationally been sought in disillusionment and philosophical maturity than where Lady Shelley found them. We remember, incidentally, that it was the daughter of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft whom Shelley married.

One most striking trait of the criticism of poetry in this and preceding decades may be illustrated by Lady Shelley's commentary upon **Julian and Maddalo.** The searching out of descriptive "beauties" seems to have been almost an obsession with the earlier critics of Shelley; the search for the "picturesque" never faltered. And this pursuit of what may be called pictorial naturalism (even when the scene is romanticized beyond all nature), we may, perhaps, refer to the influence of the "romantic" nature-and-sentiment poets of the eighteenth century; the implication being that, in its love of the ornamental and descriptive elements of poetry and its impotence in the face of the new poetic philosophies and passions and creeds, early nineteenth-century criticism lagged behind contemporary poetry in expressing and appreciating the complex spirit of what we now call the Romantic era.

> **Julian and Maddalo** is one of the most fervent, dramatic, and intense, of its author's productions; and yet one of the most compact, highly wrought, and mature. The descriptions of Italian scenery are wonderfully minute and particular, when we consider that the poet had been only about half a year in the country. Of the magnificence of the word-pictures — especially in that gorgeous vision of a Venetian sunset, sphering in a transitory glory the sea, the ships, the palaces, the distant hills, and the ghastly madhouse — it would be difficult to say too much; while the soliloquy of the poor maniac is dusky and thick with human passion and pathos — the whole tragedy of a sorrowful life brought within the compass of a few pages. The poem, moreover, is interesting on account of the portraiture given by Shelley of Lord Byron, who is figured under the name of Maddalo — Julian being Shelley himself. The little Allegra is also described in lines of gentle pathos which have never been surpassed; . . .††

And Lady Shelley quoted the passage, after the manner of the anthologizing critics — a manner which we have seen as characteristic of many in Shelley's own time.

In attributing a part of the beauty of **Prometheus Unbound** to Shelley's Italian surroundings, Lady Shelley followed the same naturalistic bent.

> But only his own subtle, and almost instinctive, apprehension of metaphysical analogies could have enabled him to endow his ideal characters with

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* For Shelley's reply to Godwin see Shelley's letter of December 11, 1817, p. 573, Vol. II of **The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley,** edited by Roger Ingpen, New York, 1909.

† That Shelley had been conscious of the peculiar qualities of the age in which he wrote, a letter of his to Mr. Ollier will testify. See **Shelley Memorials,** p. 121.

‡ Pp. 86-87.

** Pp. 72-73.

†† P. 94.

a language proper to the abstract ideas which they typify. This is the intuition of genius, which not only can create an imaginary world, but can govern it by laws in harmony with themselves and with that which they control. The personifications of Shelley's mythological drama are not the vague idealisms of a young poet seeking for effect; they have a deep psychological meaning. The poetry which they utter is like the language of beings wakening, in the fresh dawn of the world, to the mystery of their own emotions and the miraculous loveliness of the universe. We seem to behold the elemental splendour of things disarrayed of that indifference which springs from our superficial familiarity, and from the deadening effect of our conventional existence.*

The two essential facts relating to **The Cenci,** Lady Shelley saw and recorded. First, the play departed, in its use of genuine human material, from Shelley's characteristic medium of spiritual abstraction; second, it was, nevertheless, concerned with the old subject of good and evil in the world which dominated Shelley's imagination.

> The play is, in truth, a wonderful instance of mature judgment and self-control — the more extraordinary when we reflect that the author was barely seven-and-twenty when he wrote it, and that the peculiar tendency of his genius was towards an excessive affluence of imagination and fancy, and the embodiment of thoughts the most evanescent and impalpable in forms the most gorgeous and transcendent. The **Cenci** occupies entirely different ground. Everywhere we feel the earth under our feet. The characters are not personifications of abstract ideas, but are true human beings, speaking, indeed, a language exalted by passion, but, nevertheless, a language which has its roots in nature, and draws its sustenance from life. Awful are those revelations of the monstrous heart of the old man; tremendous in their hopeless agony and desolation those staggerings of the mind of Beatrice on the brink of madness; angelical, in its serene redemption from transitory error, that spirit of resignation and immortal love which rises, towards the close of the play, out of the hell of the earlier parts, and finds its most lovely expression in the final words. Never did poet more exquisitely show the triumph of Good over Evil than Shelley has done in that hushed and sacred ending. It is a voice out of the very depths of the suffering patience of humanity. But, indeed, the play throughout comes nearer to Shakspeare than any other writer has approached since Shakspeare's time.†

Of **Adonais** she wrote:

> **Adonais** abounds in passion and poetry; in bursts of eloquent grief; in profound glimpses into the divine mystery of the universe and of the soul of man; and of keen, arrowy flashes of scorn directed against those hirelings of party who endeavoured to crush the genius of Keats, simply because he was known to be the friend of men who dared to speak on behalf of freedom when to do so was considered an eighth deadly sin.‡

Finally, after asserting that Shelley had been even greater in his philanthropic spirit than in his poetic genius,** she concluded the sketch of his career by quoting a poem published in the **Leader** of Edinburgh in 1851. It was very indifferent poetry, and had been written primarily as a tribute to Mrs. Shelley, but it is still interesting for its sympathetic recognition of Shelley's essential quality — his unselfish yearning for social betterment. In part, the tribute was as follows:

> The Poet of the Soul! whose Orphic song,
> Steep'd to its depths within the light divine
> Of Nature's loveliness, and fraught all o'er
> With struggling yearnings for the weal of man,
> Descended on each sorrow-canker'd life
> Like heaven's dew upon the sunburnt plain.
>
> Mourn her not, Earth! she is at rest with him,
> The mighty minstrel of the impassion'd lay, —
> The Poet-martyr of a creed too bright . . .††

Thus, while the **Shelley Memorials** undertook neither exhaustive biography nor systematic criticism, and while its author achieved no higher literary level than that of rhetorical acclaim, the book presented in their proper aspects a few important elements of Shelley's nature and works. His so-called atheism was justly summed up as pantheism plus social insurrection; the bent of his mind toward uplift was accurately suggested in the comment upon **The Cenci;** and the greatness of his

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* Pp. 110-111.
† Pp. 117-118.
‡ P. 151.
** See p. 204.
†† P. 229.

philanthropic spirit was properly made manifest, together with the brilliance of the poetry which was its aspiring, if sometimes inadequate, expression.

In review of the **Shelley Memorials,** the **British Quarterly Review** undertook "to give our readers what we believe to be the true idea of his character and his poetry." The essay was an achievement in the technique of qualified praise; it was chiefly concerned with Shelley's art, rather than with his morals, and demonstrated how his pantheistic creed had operated to the detriment of his poetry.

The doctrines of **Queen Mab** received their usual condemnation. **The Cenci** was thought true to nature, though somewhat too closely imitative of Shakespeare; a word or two sufficed for **Prometheus Unbound, Hellas,** and **Adonais.** The odes were considered Shelley's most nearly perfect work. Of **The Revolt of Islam** it was written:

> It is a long and somewhat tedious allegorical poem, representing, in a series of unreal scenes, and in the persons of very mystical and incomprehensible characters, the progress of society to the Shelleyan ideal of perfection.*

This was a not inaccurate superficial description of the poem, which, of course, was a great deal more than a sullen protest against personal grievances.

The poet's life was summed up as a career of misdirected and undisciplined genius, a course of error rather than of evil.

> In our judgment its principal characteristic was the predominance of a powerful yet delusive imaginativeness over all his other qualities.†

The most interesting element in the review was the definition of poetry which its interpretation of Shelley implied. His work was thought to contain

> many passages of nobleness and beauty; it abounds in grace, delicacy, and refinement; and yet it is essentially faulty, unnatural, and incongruous. It would be the very perfection of poetry, if it were the office and end of that art to display the force of the imagination without regard to the truth and fitness of its creations. . . . taken as a whole, it must be pronounced a medley of errors, if the holding the mirror up to nature in its varying phenomena, and the revealing of man in the drama of human action be the true object of poetry and its chief triumph.‡

Shelley's philosophy, which had been first "a low form of Pantheism, which substantially identified God and Nature," and later "a mode of Berkleism, which asserting the diversity of spirit and matter, made the latter a phenomenon of the former," had caused the principal errors in his practice.

Of these errors there had been at least four, according to the essayist. First, Pantheism had led the poet into an intemperate anthropomorphism — the identification of natural forces with persons. Second, it had "distorted his conception of human nature." Third, it had caused him to animate mere natural objects and to spiritualize matter in a decidedly "disagreeable" way. Fourth, the view of man as spiritualized matter had rendered the poet incapable of drawing men and women "true to life." His characters, except Count Cenci who had been borrowed from Shakespeare, were not real persons at all, and the natures of his creations were to be controlled, not by recognized laws, but by the same principles that governed the world of the inanimate.

> It has seldom happened that a system of false speculation has given so distinctive a character to works of art, or that bad premises have so marred poetic conclusions.

But it was observed in his favor that when Shelley escaped from his philosophy he achieved very excellent "landscape painting."

A further fault, which had persisted in spite of his extraordinary power over language, was said to have been a lack of "invention."

> As a creator his faculty consisted only in encircling the conceptions of others with an atmosphere of splendour peculiarly his own, in which they appear radiant and indistinct; and in elaborating exquisite variations of melodies which were not originally his own.**

Apparently because he expressed his hopes for the race in so unrealistic and unhomely a fashion, Shelley had often been thought lacking in human sympathy; the present reviewer agreed in the judgment.

> Another strong characteristic of Shelley is the predominance of mere intellect in his poetry. He soars in an ideal region, from which, like the gods of the Epicureans, he feels little sympathy with actual humanity. He

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* **British Quarterly Review,** 1859, Vol. 30, p. 372.
† Ibid., p. 373.
‡ Ibid., pp. 374-375.
** Ibid., p. 385.

looks at nature and at man less in their concrete forms than as mysteries to be expressed by his art, and influenced by his philosophy.*

The essayist was not using the word "sympathy" in its old sense of mental and emotional affinity, or he might have said truly that Shelley had been alien in spirit to much of "normal" life. He meant that Shelley had not been warm and genial, which, in spite of the isolation of genius and temperament, the whole story of his life and art disproves.

The odes, which were deemed his best works, were here touched on with faint praise. **Arethusa** was considered the best; none was thought to equal "the **Hohenlinden** or the **Battle of the Baltic** of Campbell, or the celebrated song to Greece in Byron's **Don Juan.**" **The Ode to the West Wind** was thought to contain great lines, but was "overstrained" and impaired by too much philosophy. The **Skylark** was named as the most popular, but it, too, seemed diffuse and far-fetched.

The influence of the poet was judged to have been far less notable and extensive than it was generally thought.

> On the whole we are disposed to think that the peculiarities of Shelley's genius have left few traces behind in the actual school of English poetry. And this, doubtless, is as it should be. A false system of thought, an abstractedness of intellect, and a want of real human sympathy can never be the materials of great and lasting works, however they may be associated with splendour of imagination, with power of expression, and with an ear for harmony.†

This was condemnation of Shelley's art, rather than of his doctrine, and the measuring rod was that peculiar critical requirement of this and the earlier period which we have seen emerging from many essays on the subject. Aside from matter of indeterminate opinion, practically all the alleged faults found with Shelley's poetry arose from its lack of conformity to the ideal of the old descriptive poetry — eighteenth century romantic realism. The fallacy consisted in the arbitrary application to Shelley of a criterion which, while it probably seemed broad enough at the time to take in all that might reasonably be called "poetry," was such as must inevitably have excluded the symbolic, myth-making, intellectual, and spiritualizing qualities which distinguished Shelley's work and which should have led, as in the case of Lewes, to an attempt to describe and evaluate it in terms of its own peculiar nature. This primary responsibility of the critic, the present reviewer never fully satisfied.

In 1860, the last year of our period, the **Encylopaedia Britannica** appeared in its eighth edition with an article on Shelley by G. McDonald, later to be displaced by Rossetti's study. This essay had to do chiefly, so far as its criticism went, with **The Cenci** and **Prometheus Unbound,** and with the general qualities of Shelley's mind and poetry. The unlikeness of Shelley to other English poets, his much maligned but upright life, and his attacks upon the "miserable perversions" of Christianity were noted in introduction. It was thought that his taste for metaphysics had exceeded his power in that medium, that he had been obscure, that his language had often been the clothing rather than the embodiment of his thought, and that his earlier work had been the utterance rather than the conveyance of his meaning. In other words, he was judged deficient in art.

The Cenci was given its prominent position in the critique apparently because it had "attracted more attention during his lifetime than any other of his works." It was thought natural in expression, though with little difference between the modes of speech of its different persons.

> The whole drama, indeed, is constructed around, not a prominent point, but a dim, infinitely-withdrawn, underground perspective of dismay and agony. Perhaps it detracts a little from our interest in the Lady Beatrice, that after all she should wish to live, and should seek to preserve her life by a denial of her crime. She, however, evidently justifies the denial to herself on the ground that, the deed being absolutely right, although regarded as most criminal by her judges, the only way to get true justice is to deny the fact, which, there being no guilt, she might consider as only a verbal lie. Her very purity of conscience enables her to utter this with the most absolute innocence of look, word, and tone.

This was the old explanation of Leigh Hunt; as to the old problem of why the story was chosen:

> He must have been attracted to the subject by its embodying the concentration of tyranny, lawlessness, and brutality in old Cenci, as opposed to, and exercised upon, an ideal loveliness and nobleness in the person of Beatrice.

This, in its turn, was not unlike the motive cited by Mrs. Shelley.

Of the **Prometheus Unbound,** McDonald wrote:

> [It] combines the greatest amount of individual power and peculiarity. . . .

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* Ibid., p. 387.
† Ibid., p. 391.

> In reading this, as in reading most of his poetry, we feel that, unable to cope with the evils and wrongs of the world as it and they are, he constructs a new universe, wherein he may rule according to his will; and a good will in the main it is — good always in intent, good generally in form and utterance.

In distinguishing Shelley's peculiar genius from that of other writers, the essayist made an interesting distinction between fancy and imagination.

> That which chiefly distinguished Shelley from other writers is the unequalled exuberance of his fancy. . . . The evidences of pure imagination in his writings are unfrequent as compared with those of fancy: there are not half the instances of the direct embodiment of idea in form, that there are of the presentation of strange resemblances between external things.

The **Ode to the West Wind** was counted one of Shelley's finest; the **Skylark,** as usual, was judged the most popular poem of its author in that kind, and the **Cloud** second in reputation. **The Sensitive Plant,** that old favorite of the early critics, was thought interesting chiefly as revealing the fascination for Shelley of the ugly and revolting.

In conclusion, the essayist sought to clear away the misrepresentation and misunderstanding which had attended the growth of Shelley's reputation.

> . . . regarding him merely as a poet, Shelley has written verse which will last as long as the English literature lasts; valuable not only from its excellence, but from the peculiarity of its excellence. To say nothing of his noble aims and hopes, Shelley will always be admired for his sweet melodies, lovely pictures, and wild prophetic imaginings. His indignant remonstrances, intermingled with grand imprecations, burst in thunder from a heart overcharged with the love of his kind, and roused to a keener sense of all oppression by the wrongs which sought to overwhelm himself. But as he recedes further in time, and men are able to see more truly the proportion of the man, they will judge, that without having gained the rank of a great reformer, Shelley had in him that element of wide sympathy and lofty hope for his kind which is essential to the **birth** and the subsequent **making** of the greatest of poets.

It is perhaps the condition of an authoritative work of reference that it must contain only matter of established truth; in any case, this summary of Shelley terminated in the equivocation of conservatism. There emerged from it only such results as had been held in common by most of the critical schools; and these were restated with no new ardor of language and from no new and constructive point of view. Even such enthusiasts as Lewes had thought Shelley weakest on the side of poetical art; McDonald attempted to specify this artistic deficiency. The specification emerged from his distinction between imagination and fancy; there was not, he said, in Shelley's work, the inherent identity of idea and language which should characterize the inspired poetic creation. Whatever one may think of Shelley's theory of art, this particular criticism seems one of the most unjustified and unsubstantiated that might be advanced against its practice. That conscious process, known as "artistry," in which poetry is made to express itself in terms of natural analogy, conscious comparison, and conventional similarity was less frequent with Shelley than with almost any of his great contemporaries. It was the lack of such ornamental ballast of suggestion and comparison which Keats most likely had had in mind when he advised Shelley to "be more of an artist and load every rift of your subject with ore." That sort of Art was not native to his genius and technique. But, on the other hand, the "direct embodiment of idea in form" had been the native medium of his poetic utterance; its very directness at times seems to have alienated it from the realm of "art." The serpent in **The Revolt of Islam** was not something to which the Spirit of Good was compared — it was the Spirit of Good itself, directly presented and made visible. "Desires and Adorations," in **Adonais,** were not so much described in simile, metaphor, and analogy as set forth in direct and pregnantly suggestive identity with the very language which embodied them.

It is fitting that this study should close with an essay by a man who was at once a great poet, a free-thinker, a victim of tragic fatality, and a critic of enthusiasm and transcendent vision. In 1860 James Thomson, whose pseudonym of "B. V." symbolized his high regard for Shelley and Novalis, published in the free-thinking **National Reformer** an essay which attempted the enthusiastic description of those cardinal qualities which had marked the work of his favorite poet.*

Thomson's method in this essay was, in its outward procedure, deductive; he formulated concepts of the highest poetical virtues and applied them to Shelley, defending both his art and his ideas. The essence of his interpretation was that Shelley's greatness was securely based upon his bardic inspiration and his moral view of the cosmos — the highest products of the poetic and philosophic minds. For him, the poet, in any field of art, was the bard:

> A poet, in our restricted sense of the term, may be defined, an inspired singer; the singing, the spontaneous musical utterance being essential to the

* **The National Reformer,** 1860, issue for December 22, pp. 6-7.

poetic character. Great learning, profound thought, and keen moral insight may all enrich a volume, which shall yet, lacking this instinctive harmony, be no poem — Verse equally with prose may be unpoetic through this fatal want.

In this highest quality he thought Shelley supreme:

> In musicalness, in free and, as it were, living melody, the poems of Shelley are unsurpassed, and on the whole, I think, unequalled by any others in our literature. Compared with that of most others his language is as a river to a canal, — a river ever flowing "at its own free will," and whose music is the unpurposed result of its flowing. So subtly sweet and rich are the tones, so wonderfully are developed the perfect cadences, that the meaning of the words of the singing is lost and dissolved in the overwhelming rapture of the impression. I have often fancied, while reading them, that his words were really transparents, or that they throbbed with living lustres. Meaning is therein, firm and distinct, but "scarce visible through extreme loveliness"; so that the mind is often dazzled from perception of the surpassing grandeur and power of his creations. I doubt not that Apollo was mightier than Hercules, though his divine strength was veiled in the splendour of his symmetry and beauty more divine.

Admitting that beauty of expression had been known to embody unworthy thought, but believing that most often purity of style is accompanied by exalted subject matter, Thomson entered upon four inquiries about Shelley.

> (I.) What are the favorite subjects of Shelley's song — great or small? (II.) Is his treatment of these great-minded? (III.) Is it great-hearted? And, rising to the climax. (IV.) Is it such as to entitle him to the epithet **inspired?**

To the first of these he replied that the general subjects of Shelley's muse were great and most important:

> The questions concerning the existence of God, the moral law of the universe, the immortality of the soul, the independent being of what is called the material world, the perfectibility of man; these and their kindred perpetually fascinate his mind to their investigation. It may be considered by many . . . that mere addictedness to discourse on great subjects is no proof of a great mind. . . . Nevertheless, believing that the essence of poetry and philosophy is communication with the Infinite and the Eternal, I venture to conclude that to be strongly inclined to such communication is to be gifted with the first requisite for a poet and a philosopher. The valiant heart may prove victorious without the strong arm, but the strong arm without the valiant heart must be beaten ignominiously forever.

Of the poet's specific philosophical ideas, he thought that they were worthy of association with these great themes; that Shelley's views, if they might not always be proved right, might not easily be refuted; that their magnanimity was worthy of their inspired expression. He agreed with Shelley on the problem of sex, but could not hold his faith in perfectibility.

> (II.) But have his thoughts and his conceptions a magnanimity befitting these subjects? He upholds strenuously the Manichean doctrine, that the world is the battlefield of a good and an evil spirit, each aboriginal; of whom the evil has been and still is the more powerful, but the good shall ultimately triumph. Let those who scoff so liberally at this, account for the existence of evil and a devil created by an omnipotent all-holy God. How magnificent is his conception of these hostile powers, symbolised in the eagle and serpent, in the opening of "The Revolt of Islam"; how sublime is it in the Prometheus Unbound, where they are represented by Jupiter and Prometheus!
>
> He proclaims enthusiastically the Idealism of Plato, of Spinoza, of Berkeley, of Kant. Let those who so stolidly sneer at this, expound by what possibility spirit and matter can influence each other without one attribute in common; or let them demonstrate the existence of matter apart from our perception; or let them show, if there be but one existing substance, that it is such as we should call matter rather than spirit. How glorious are his exposition of this philosophy in the "Ode to Heaven" and the speeches of Ahasuerus in "Hellas!"

Although he could not agree in the optimism of ultimate human perfection, Thomson regarded it correctly as the moving force of the Shelleyan system, and reverenced the nature that could whole-heartedly maintain its truth.

> Right or wrong, it is the very mainspring of his philosophic system. In Queen Mab, in the Revolt of Islam, in the Prometheus Unbound, its expression glows with the solemn inspiration of prophecy. As Scott was the poet

of the past, and Goethe of the present, so was Shelley of the future; the thought of whose developed triumphs always kindles him into rapture. However dissident, we cannot but reverence so sublime and unselfish an enthusiasm: perchance, were we more like him in goodness, we should be more like him in faith. Expand the stage from our earth to the universe, the time from one life to an infinite succession of lives, let the **dramatis personae** be not men only but all living souls; and this catastrophe, if catastrophe there must be, is the most righteous and lofty conclusion ever suggested for the great drama.

On the matter of sexual relationships Thomson agreed with Shelley; his infidelity he saw clearly as more an attack upon "Priestianity" than upon Christianity. Any of the poet's concepts, he thought, might serve to indicate the consistently exalted plane of Shelley's thought:

> Space being restricted, suffice it to say that, in all his thoughts one is struck by a certain loftiness and breadth characteristic of the best minds. It is as if they looked around from the crest of a mountain, with vision unbaffled by the crowd and the chimney-tops. Now, exactly as the height at which a person stands may be calculated from any one object on his horizon as well as from a hundred, so one of these superior thoughts is in itself proof sufficient of an elevated mind. For quantity is the measure of low things, but quality of high.

In considering Shelley's message of "moral emotion," "B. V." at once identified the poetry with the poet, and the poet with the higher evangelism of beauty:

> What moral emotion, pure or impure, noble or mean, generous or selfish, does Shelley effuse through his works? The question has been partly answered already; for in a poet, whose theme is concrete with man and abstract with destiny, the spirit refuses to be analysed into thought and passion, being the identity of the two. Morally, he is indeed sainted. . . . The creeds, the rituals, the ceremonies, — those media which common men require to temper the else intolerable splendour of divine truth, — he did not need: his eagle eye could gaze unblenching upon the cloudless sun. And his life incarnated his poetry. He was his own Prometheus. . . . He perceived — who better? — the symbolism of the visible world; he appreciated — who more rapturously? — its divine beauty; but he did not rest here: he lived higher to the beauty of that which is symbolised, to the beauty which is called "of holiness"; to the laws of that realm which is eternal. He was not "master of the revels to mankind," but prophet and preacher. His music was as the harping of David to charm away the evil spirit from Saul.

By his vision of the moral cosmos, Thomson justified the claim of Shelley to rank among those prophets and poets who in the highest sense are called inspired. This higher inspiration, we have seen, constituted Thomson's criterion of poetic genius.

> What is it then which differentiates him from the second-class poets, and exalts him to sit with Isaiah and Dante as one of that small choir of chief singers who are called transcendant? It is that of which I but now spoke; it is that of which he is so often accused under the name of mysticism. I dare affirm that no great writer is less obscure in manner, in expression, than he; obscure in matter he is, and ever must be, to those in whom is not developed the faculty correlative to those ideas in whose expression he extremely delights. . . . And to the ideal or spiritual harmonies, perfect and eternal, to whose rhythm and melody the Universe is attuned, so that it is fitly called Cosmos, — to these we **are** most of us deaf; and whoever with reverence and love and rapture is devoted to their celebration — be it Plato or Swedenborg, Emerson or Shelley — shall for ever to the great mass be as one who is speaking in an unknown tongue, or who is raving of phantasies which have no foundation in reality.
>
> Therefore the accusations of mysticism but ignorantly affirm that he was intensely and purely a poet. . . . "For a poet is indeed a thing ethereally light, winged and sacred; nor can he compose any thing worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired and, as it were, mad."* Shelley himself, in that "Defence of Poetry" which is one of the most beautiful prose pieces in the language . . . repeatedly insists upon it as the essential law of poetic creation.

The following description of poetry deserves to be known and repeated among those utterances which have most nearly succeeded in putting into words the intellectual import of the poet's art:

> The only true, or inspired poetry, is always from within, not from without. The experience contained in it has been spiritually transmuted from

* Quoted from Shelley's translation of Plato's **Ion.**

lead into gold. It is severely logical, the most trivial of its adornments being subservient to, and suggested by, the dominant idea; any departure from whose dictates would be the "falsifying of a revelation." It is unadulterated with worldly wisdom, deference to prevailing opinions, mere talent or cleverness.

Its anguish is untainted by the gall of bitterness, its joy is never selfish, its grossness is never obscene. It perceives always the profound identity underlying all surface differences. It is a living organism, not a dead aggregate, and its music is the expression of the law of its growth; so that it could no more be set to a different melody than could a rose-tree be consummated with lilies or violets. It is most philosophic when most enthusiastic; the clearest light of its wisdom being shed from the keenest fire of its love. It is a synthesis not arithmetical, but algebraical; that is to say, its particular subjects are universal symbols, its predicates universal laws; hence it is infinitely suggestive. It is ever-fresh wonder at the infinite mystery, ever-young faith in the eternal soul. Whatever be its mood, we feel that is not self-possessed but God-possessed; whether the God come down serene and stately as Jove, when a swan he wooed Leda; or with overwhelming might insupportably burning, as when he consumed Semele.

This definition of the highest poetry is difficult to refute; it is in many senses the highest concept of that art, which has become so elusively Protean in the evanescent vocabularies of theory and criticism. It does not describe all verse, but rather the essential poetry of all art; it would be possible, then, to admit its presence in all of Shelley's work without invalidating the statement, if it were otherwise true, that he was less the craftsman-artist than many a songster of more pedestrian gait. But it is impossible to deny that this criterion does point directly at the highest element in creative genius. The simple argument of Thomson's criticism asserted with irrefutable logic that if this were the greatest poesy, Shelley must be ranked with the greatest poets.

These distinctive marks of the highest poetry I find displayed in the works of Shelley more gloriously than in those of any other poet in our language. As we must study Shakespeare for knowledge of idealised human nature, and Fielding for knowledge of human nature unidealised, and Carlyle's French Revolution as the unapproached mood of history, and Currer Bell's "Villette" to learn the highest capabilities of the novel, and Ruskin for the true philosophy of art, and Emerson for quintessential philosophy; so must we study, and so will future men more and more study, Shelley for quintessential poetry. It was a good nomenclator who first called him the poet of poets.

There is pathos in this admiration of the tragic son of pessimism for the prophet of transcendent optimism; and there are more strength and truth in his criticism, more sound and reasoned poetic gospel, than one might expect from one romantic genius about another. In its intellectual aspect Thomson's essay proceeded with an invulnerable logic from the formulation of an unassailable premise about the highest poetry, through a simple and valid application to Shelley, to the irrefutable affirmation of his supreme genius. It defined the poet — but the poet only in the highest sense, and not every author of verse — as the inspired singer.. The limitation of this definition strengthened its force, where Lewes's description of the bard was weakened by including **all** poets — all men to whom the term might legitimately be applied. Thomson did not unreasonably limit the word "poet" — he merely dealt with one sort of poet: the voice of the highest vision.

The application of this concept to Shelley, considering his themes, his ideas, his moral sublimity, and his matchless verse, left no doubt of his identification with the critic's ideal; and it is an identification which no one who admits Shelley's purity of motive can well refute.

It is to be noted that Thomson's criterion of inspiration was united with the requirement that its bard have also a moral vision of the cosmos. Delphic ecstasy alone would not have satisfied his definition. Such a vision he found in Shelley, supported by such a faith in its divine catastrophe as Thomson himself could never share. Inspired utterance he regarded as the quintessence of poetry; a prophetic sense of the dramatic progress of the race, its patterned and purposeful development from time to eternity, he saw as the quintessence of philosophy.

Of the external influences of Shelley's work, Thomson was concerned with the spiritual force of poetry alone, the "moral emotion" which is elicited by the presentation of vision and truth in inspiring language. Thus he came immediately to the highest function of Shelley's art as teacher, disregarding all lesser, ordinary moral aims. He believed in this moral and alterative force, without believing in the perfectibility which had, in Shelley, given it its persistent and optimistic motive. And his view was much like that of Browning, implying the ethical and spiritual benefaction of all the highest art.

The incomprehensibility of the prophetic genius he did well to mention. For the understanding of the prophets of literature it seems that more than mental sympathy has always been required. There must be a belief in prophecy itself as a mode of art, and an affinity with the unrealistic medium in which such prophecy must be embodied if it is to escape the limitations of time and circumstance and become eternal truth. It was the view of art as anything but prophecy — as moral realism,

naturalistic description, circumstantial truth, human portrayal — which had done most to weaken and render inadequate the critics of Shelley; Thomson could hardly have done a greater service to his master poet than to present this fundamental requisite for his appreciation.

Finally, the criticism of "B. V." included the recognition of the peculiarity of Shelley's work as a cardinal condition of its appreciation. It was bard's prophecy and high imagination, and was to be approached as such, and judged on its own plane of achievement. Shelley had been criticized in terms of almost every school of literature except his own. He had dissatisfied the realists, except in **The Cenci**; he had angered the conventional moralists; he had only occasionally provided the criticism of eighteenth-century naturalism with its desideratum of the "picturesque." He had offered bread, and had had it judged in terms of the chemistry of stones. To this whole incongruity of standard Thomson opposed sympathetic and enlightening dicta. His essay was a study in attitudes toward art, as well as an evaluation of art from the attitude he had himself already achieved.

Thus, in its emphasis upon the distinguishing qualities of Shelley's poetry, its trenchant logic of evaluation, its formulation of definitions and standards, its recognition of "moral emotion" as the highest contribution of poetry to the spirit, its assertion of the needs of an esoteric standard for the appreciation of esoteric verse, and its affirmation of the ideal of its prophet, James Thomson's study of Shelley created what is, perhaps, the most notable, suggestive, and relevant appreciation of its subject which falls within the limits of our period. In attitude, in mental and emotional affinity with the poet, in the constructive formulation of new standards for a new art, he assisted in the production of that perspicacious Shelley canon which we have seen emerging sporadically from the reactionary and antiquated criticisms. But his cardinal and most truly creative virtue as a critic was that which we premised in the beginning as the ultimate requirement of critical achievement: he conveyed the sense of a participation in ecstasy, the record of a companionship with Shelley upon the poetic heights, the report of one who speaks alluringly of a world of Shelleyan beauty in which he is a native and at home.

In this last period of our study the periodical criticism of Shelley was supplemented by standardizing histories and encyclopaedias and the relatively permanent publications of essayists, as well as by the writings of the Shelley circle. The ideals of eighteenth-century naturalism contested with the new criteria of his enthusiastic followers in the formulation of poetical desiderata; and the old moral horror joined forces with the conservative theology of Victorian churchmen in the condemnation of his dogma of revolution in public and private morals. But there was more and more emphasis upon his art, and less and less upon his ethics; the Victorian critics were chiefly concerned with generalized philosophical discussions of "Shelleyism" and seemed to pride themselves upon the restrained and intellectual orderliness with which they handled the whole business of the man and his meaning.

The enthusiastic Lewes, although at times excessive in his ill-directed praise and hasty in his generalizations, set up the quality of bardic inspiration as the goal of true poets, presented Shelley as prophet and salutary reformer, identified him with humanistic progress, praised his art less than his prophecy, and insisted upon his ethical Christianity. With this position ,such conservative ideals as those of **Chambers's Cyclopaedia** came into striking contrast, in their traditional allegiance to the eighteenth-century standard which regarded Shelley as morbid, obscure, lacking in the sources of human sympathy and interest, and deficient in moral realism.

George Gilfillan, also, though opposed to Shelley's doctrine and inclined to regard his genius as diseased, expressed the imperative need of an evaluating standard commensurate with Shelley's peculiar aims, replied to the conventional and misleading attacks upon his art which had arisen from the use of incongruous ideals, and combined enthusiastic participation in his imaginary world with a conscious analysis of the methods by which that world was constructed.

De Quincey contributed the informal document of a personal and sentimental retrospect, and devoted himself to biographical comment and to the theme of Christianity's alienation of a spiritual prodigy. In the latter he was joined by such examiners into the poet's theology as he who wrote in the **Prospective Review** in 1849.

The **Athenaeum** and the **Eclectic Review** introduced the historical method, interpreting Shelley's idiosyncrasies in terms of the traits of his age; the resultant conclusion consisted in blaming his errors upon environment instead of searching his meanings for a more valid philosophy than the extremists of his own time had preached and practised. The **North British Review,** segregating his philosophy from his art, found virtue only in his one great achievement in objectivity — **The Cenci** — and thus designated the work which in this period was commonly considered his best. The orderly theorizing of the **Edinburgh Review** in this period also dismissed his doctrines with Victorian complacency, and apologized for those traits in his art which were at once essential to the Shelleyan quality and obnoxious to the conservative standard.

Scottish reactionary theology found its voice in literary criticism, expressing itself in shocked anathema in **Hogg's Instructor,** and in the assurance of the naturalistic school in D. M. Moir; it indicated in both expressions that it had lagged far behind the van of Romantic thought, artistic as well as moral.

Browning, in the expounding of his personal views about creative genius, formulated a theory very favorable to Shelley in his insistence upon aspiration rather than achievement, the high moral value of art, and the definition of the poet as bard. He was also among those who found in Shelley the essential elements of Christianity. In view of his early and persistent admiration of Shelley, it is quite possible that

Shelley's own influence and example may have had much to do with the formation of the standard which was thus applied to him.

The works of Balfour, Creasy, and Kingsley were chiefly concerned with the description of Shelley's influence. Kingsley was peculiarly hostile, failed to admit the morally uplifting element in the poetry, and expressed in his essay a reaction, in which he was not alone, against the errors of Romanticism and the sentimental legend of Shelley.

Walter Bagehot illustrated in his essay the prevalent tendency to explain the nature of genius rather than to judge its productions. He applied to Shelley a theory of the poetic mind which represented the poet as a creature of "impulse" and thus sought to explain that portion of Shelley's mind which was beyond the rational; his exposition of the extreme simplicity of this type of mind constituted a plausible comment upon the phenomenon of a genius alien alike to the taste of the critic and to the intellectual quality of his criticism. His method was the calm analysis frequently found in the interpretations of his time; his moral creed was an equally prevalent conservatism; and the procedure of his essay involved the somewhat dangerous appeal to biography.

To the voice of Victorian conservatism the radical **Westminster Review** opposed itself, asserting the reality of those abuses which Shelley had assailed; but it introduced a standard of industrialized practicality and poetic materialism, the fruit of England's mechanic prosperity, which was far less capable of evaluating Shelley than was even the most conservative theological dogmatism.

Chambers's Journal resurrected the old charge of spectacular vanity, a relic of the hostility of Shelley's own times; the **Eclectic Review** of 1858, under the influence of Moir, perpetuated the Scottish theological antagonism, and renewed the assault upon Shelley's life as well as upon his poetry; **Notes and Queries** introduced the comparative criticism of parallel-searching, but even this was not free from ethical recrimination. Middleton's biography, in 1858, added a lengthy and ambitious but ineffectual chapter to the legend of the "Eternal Child." But Lady Shelley's **Shelley Memorials,** in the following year, presented a capable but unpresumptuous biography and criticism, using narrative and descriptive methods to set forth the truth about Shelley's quasi-atheism, his distinction as a philanthropic mind, and his intense predilection toward social uplift.

The final criticisms of the period, whether by the influence of the **Memorial** or not, were directed chiefly at Shelley's art rather than at his message. The **British Quarterly Review** presented a study of the influence of the poet's pantheism upon his verse; the **Encyclopaedia Britannica** included a conservative summary of his achievement; and James Thomson, enthusiast though he was, published a peculiarly logical and orderly essay which sought to show how, in his vision of the moral cosmos and in his inspired and inspiring medium of verse, Shelley had fulfilled the highest role of poet in the double sense of bard and prophet.

The standards and methods of English poetical criticism were thus not completely different from those of Shelley's day. The old admiration for the "picturesque," though not so freely given to the cataloguing of fine passages as formerly, persisted in its demand for descriptive beauty, conventional moral purpose, and wholesome human realism. Description in poetry had not wholly given place to high inspiration. The criticism of the period, as to Shelley, was largely philosophical, dividing itself between the two matters of morals and art; speaking broadly and confidently in discussion of theory rather than in specific commentary. It preserved an admitted distinction between poetry and philosophy which applied unfavorably to Shelley's poetical embodiment of theory and dogma; it evinced at times a British reticence which disapproved the Latin passion of his personal revelations; it rested its case at other times upon a narrow Scottish moralism oblivious of the higher morality of his ideals.

Interest in the poet's character persisted, but the fallacy of personal reaction and the invalidating dependence upon biography for critical evidence were not so prevalent as in earlier years. The historical method was introduced, with the passage of time, and figured prominently in mid-century explanations of Shelley's doctrines, while it could contribute but little to the elucidation of his poetry, since few save Kingsley noted that there had been such a thing as a "Romantic Movement." Time and change had brought a stable morality, an accepted theology, and a confidence in the autochthonous aspects of the national literature; English ethics found Shelley's creed erroneous and, in the face of his art, negligible; a complacent theology lamented his alienation from the Christian church; while his newly recognized philanthropy obscured the achievement of his art as much as did those qualities in it which were foreign to the prevalent taste.

Finally, the spirit of the Victorian literature of comment and evaluation was logical and philosophical rather than a participating poetic spirit. There was in it an effort toward high reasonableness, rational accuracy, description, analysis — the criticism of intellectual response, safely premised upon an irrefragable code. Only among those enthusiasts whose tastes had probably been formed in part by the very poet whom they eulogized was to be found the record of that exalted participation in the poet's vision which marks the climax of creative appreciation.

CHAPTER V.

A FINAL COMMENTARY

There are two opposed aspects of every period in which great men appear and do their work. We are most apt to think of such a period in terms of its salient minds and distinctive achievements, to judge it by those men or events which by reason of their very eminence are least characteristic. There was a Romantic Period of variant and rebellious aspiration, and of this Shelley was a part; there was also a Romantic Period of conservative thought and crystallized opinion, and by this he was judged. The times denied and repudiated much of that very renaissance which provides the literary name by which we know them. Similarly, there was a Victorian age of highly original thought and literature, and a Victorian age of conservatism, dogma, materialism, which looked askance at that other Spirit of the Period.

Thus, in the criticism of Shelley, it came about inevitably, and not altogether unprofitably, that he, one of the great minority of genius, was evaluated chiefly in terms of the grand majority and traditional level of thought. It is obvious that the greater the artist's rebellion, the sadder and more devastating will be the results of its conflict with the contemporary mind. Shelley's rebellion was radical; and the poetic and sociological tempers of both periods were peculiarly alien to the meaning of his genius and social insurrection.

Thus, the history of Shelley criticism is a chronicle of conflict between traditional codes of morality and art and the incremental influence of a new poetry and a new philosophy. Every highly original art, even as it discovers its own direction and develops its own medium, must create its own conditions of response and build for itself the standards by which it may most profitably be judged. It is significantly true that the Shelleyan art was never seen in its true light until it had achieved, by the proselytizing force of its unique apocalypse of beauty, a Shelleyan criticism to reply to it. As Shelley's character won its company of sympathizing friends, and his sentiment its quota of imitative literati, so the higher reaches of his art recruited perspicacious enthusiasts, such as Browning and Lewes, who, if the whole truth was not in them, reported of him in the Shelleyan spirit .

The present study has attempted to exercise a temperate analysis and a thoughtful appreciation upon the principal interpretations of this poet which appeared in print during his own and the early Victorian age. It has dealt not with one author but with scores of authors; the most useful of its results are probably those specific comments, as varied as the essays upon which they are made, in which it has sought to correct, interpret, and supplement the myriad voices of this criticism. Such conclusions are no more susceptible of adequate summary than is the biography of a complex mind, composite of a multitude of distinct and suggestive circumstances. Analysis and appreciation have therefore been attached to each essay in its place. The most significant passages have been selected from the stream of comment, assembled out of their various distinguished and obscure sources, and presented for their own interest and worth. Their critical methods have been described and judged, the prevalent standards of the periods, so far as they emerge, have been pointed out, and the slow growth of a Shelley "intelligence" has become perceptible along the stream.

This study has also attempted to present a view of Shelley as he may now be seen through the composite eye of historical interpretation and modern scholarly perception. Biographical facts present one likeness of the man; his own poetry provides a somewhat different portrait of the poet; and his critics, having seen him from many and varying vantage-points of time and attitude, have left a representation of him which is for the first time brought into focus by the arrangement which this paper provides.

The irrelevant ends alike of mere critical history and of direct and unattached criticism it has been the practice of the writer to avoid; but his own view of the poet has inevitably appeared in his comments upon the commentators. The complementary aspects of Shelley — as dynamic reformer of society by the varying means of political prose, satire, and high poetry; as formulator and practitioner of a thoughtful theory of moral imagination; and as valid prophet of humanitarian progress — have both provided a part of the standard by which his critics have been interpreted, and served the comparison of their protrayal of the poet with the clarified conception of modern times.

Thus, though no summary can well assemble the critical minutiae which have resulted from this investigation, it may be well to indicate in conclusion a number of significant or striking qualities which appear in the course of Shelley criticism from 1818, and earlier, to 1860.

The great poets and notable men of the older generation in Shelley's time, as we have seen, left no very considerable comment; there were a few instances of appreciation of his spirit, a few of admiration for his art, and a number in condemnation of his doctrine.

The periodical critics of his own time and the years immediately following were chiefly hostile, condemning his moral influence as evil and his social philosophy as absurd. He was early identified with the Satanic School of Byron, and his philanthropy was for long obscured beneath his reputation as literary libertine. The admiration of his brilliant and picturesque qualities, as we saw, gave evidence of the prevalence in this time of a standard of poetry which was both artistically and morally conservative — what we have called the didactic and pictorial naturalism of the preceding century.

Journalistic conditions in this era we have found influencing the criticism of Shelley in various dubious ways. The explicit tolerance of **Blackwood's** gave rise to a critical procedure which aimed at moral and aesthetic evangelism, and which professed a tremendous responsibility for the public weal. The **Edinburgh Review** was long inexplicably silent; Macaulay's remarks, which it published in a review of **Pilgrim's Progress,** were both incidental and highly generalized, but apparently gave rise to much later discussion of Shelley's classical qualities. Hazlitt's reviews introduced a critical method which was employed more temperately by John Stuart Mill and others: the use of a theory of mind for purposes of judgment and description; Hazlitt also reflected what was probably an extensive reaction against romantic excesses in art, as well as against the Shelleyan temperament. The **Quarterly Review** introduced, among other devices of attack, the technique of critical parody and logical mutilation, and carried through to its ultimate fallacy the practice of personal reproach. Other reviews were hostile also; but we have been less concerned with that fact of literary history than with its results — the employment of a moral criterion of poetry which was rooted much deeper than the mere reaction against Shelleyan extremes, and the condemnation of certain qualities of Romanticism in general, especially the admiration and imitation of the elder English poets.

Within this first period there was also seen the growth of that sentimental legend which gave rise to much of the criticism of "sensibility" and to the easy dismissal of doctrinal and reformatory questions. There also emerged from the tacit application of admitted aims in poetry a conscious reformulation, especially in **Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,** of new or rehabilitated poetical dicta — definitions of lyric and dramatic poetry, recognition of the indirect moral influence of verse, and judgments as to the use of biography in criticism — which were substituted, as more general criteria, for the ideal of direct ethical instruction. The older standards maintained their places at the same time, and the conservative school found an effectual voice as late as 1834 in the preface by Sir Henry Taylor; while philosophical criticism was still far from enthusiastic appreciation of the distinctive Shelleyan merits.

From this earlier period there evolved, therefore, a somewhat broader philosophy of poetry, before which the question of Shelley's moral meaning stood in less conspicuous a light than did the meaning of his art and mental qualities. Historical interpretation was introduced also, with the clarifying passage of years, in the examination of his times for their formative forces upon the poet. But nowhere in the period did there arise what one might call a school of "romantic" criticism, in the sense in which Shelley himself had been "romantic."

The criticism furnished by the circle of Shelley's friends was in almost every case incidental to editorial or biographical purposes. It was purely critical only in the sense in which biography and editorship are critical — it interpreted the man without cleanly distinguishing his poetry from himself. The unusual degree to which Shelley was really identified with his expressions in the art lent this method a peculiar fascination; it was moreover true that interest in Shelley's character seemed often in those times to exceed interest in his poetry, and that his character stood in unusual need of clarification in the public mind. The incidental quality of these poetical criticisms, therefore, did not render them irrelevant; nor were they necessarily invalid from their association with the personal view of their subject. They possessed the advantages and disadvantages of the biographical bent: the virtues of intimate acquaintance with their subject, of sympathy with his personality, of preparatory acceptance of his aims; and the faults of partisanship, emotionalism, and an absence of disinterested and philosophical approach.

Of this group of writers, Leigh Hunt, and he only at certain times, was the only one who dealt with Shelley in the spirit of unmingled literary interpretation. His concern was largely with the poet's message of reform, in the aim of which he had an active participating interest. This purpose he presented and explained with ingenious and effective public advocacy, directing attention to the broader and least questionable virtues of the Shelleyan code; but he never seems to have possessed the abstract taste and the affinity for things of the spirit which were necessary for more than the merely conventional appreciation of Shelley's art. His opinion, therefore, coincided in part with a judgment which still justly persists: that Shelley would have written more effectively (for his art) if he had been less obviously purposeful and more realistic.

Mrs. Shelley provided an interesting account of physical and spiritual environment which mingled with a biographical concern the explanation of causes, aims, and qualities. Medwin assumed the substantial identity of Shelley and his poetry in a biography which documented the life from the poems and summed it up in pious eloquence. Trelawney and Peacock contributed chiefly to the record of circumstance; while Hogg, insisting upon Shelley's exalted inspiration as his distinguishing quality, reduced his principles to an impeccable generality. The specific qualities of each of these authors we have noted and evaluated; their common quality was personal concern with Shelley the man.

In the years from 1840 to 1860 there arose an analytical and philosophical type of critical essay which was chiefly concerned with Shelley's art in general and with the nature and constitution of his mind. There had appeared also, as early as 1830, a new emphasis upon the standard of intrinsic merit as the law of poetical worth. In contrast to these intellectual tendencies in the critical stream was the resurrection by Victorian theology and Scottish moralism of the old moral issue. With these there persisted also the criterion of orthodox naturalism, especially in historical and standardizing works.

Opposed in various ways to all of these were the voices of Shelley enthusiasts, such

as Lewes and Browning, who chiefly recorded an aesthetic participation in the poet's mood. With the purely appreciative phases of their essays, there was advanced also a somewhat argumentative claim for Shelley's essential Christianity and a convincing advocacy of the Shelleyan definition of the poet as bard and hero. Lewes likewise identified Shelley with the progress of humanitarianism and thus approached more nearly than any other critic in the period to the admission of the practical worth of his philosophy; Browning, insisting upon aspiration as a nobler thing than achievement, presented a harmonizing view of the moral aspect of all great poetic art.

George Gilfillan, although he regarded Shelley's genius as pathological and his philosophy as null and void, insisted upon a new and relevant standard for the judgment of his unique poetic character, and recorded an emotional response, mingled with conscious analysis, to the ecstatic uplift of the verse. De Quincey advanced the theme of Shelley's personal excellence in an essay of sentimental retrospect, but differed with those who represented the poet as evolving toward orthodox Christianity.

Walter Bagehot, true to the scientific tendency of the time, applied to the poet an analytical theory of mind, combined with a conservative moral view and a partly biographical substantiation, which reduced his creative mentality to the single quality of impulse, and thus made clear, if by overemphasis, one characteristic aspect of his poetry. In contrast to his calm and analytical method, the radical **Westminster Review,** digressing upon the temper of the times, abused the evils which Shelley had attacked, and criticized his poetry in terms of a new poetical materialism, the fruit of the new democracy and the industrial revolution. The **Shelley Memorials** served, at about this time, to redirect attention to Shelley's religion, philanthropy, and urge for social betterment; while Kingsley's essay, representing the reaction against Shelleyan sentimentalism and romantic excess, concerned itself primarily with the aesthetic unwholesomeness of the poet's influence upon the art of the mid-century.

Finally, and with a climactic significance for our study, James Thomson acclaimed the bardic quality as Shelley's contribution to inspired English poetry, and made enthusiastic assertion of its validity as the ultimate test of greatness in the art.

In this Victorian period may be observed, in the writings of critics who were much influenced one by the other, a gradual loss of interest in the specific doctrines of the poet, an agreement upon the beauty of his character and motives, a persistent preference for his more sentimental as well as for his more objective works, a fondness for contrasting him with Byron, an emphatic condemnation of the cult of Shelleyan "sensibility," and a tendency to offer thoughtful analysis rather than ecstatic rhapsody in appreciation of his works. There was an obvious pride among Victorian writers in calm and philosophic utterance. The biographical interest persisted, in conjunction with the development of a conscious historical perspective; art and morals received a divided emphasis; conservative theology exerted a continuous influence. There was generalized appreciation of the poet's art, usually, rather than specific response to individual poems. Interest in "picturesque" beauty was never completely lost; the goal of normal poetic naturalism remained as the essential good in many a critic's mind; but there was evolved also a standard, created by the Shelleyan quality for its own appreciation, of inspiration, transcendental morality, and prophetic intuition, the advocacy of which chiefly distinguished the Shelley enthusiast from the characteristic mid-century philosopher.

Of the individual poems, we have observed a legion of opinions, far too varied and numerous for profitable recapitulation. Most interesting of these, perhaps, are the prevailing admiration for the more pictorial, sentimental, and naturalistic of the lyrics, and the choice of **The Cenci** as Shelley's climactic work. In this connection, it is significant that the **Ode to the West Wind** was so seldom selected for praise. The neglect of this finest of the lyrics and the consistent praise of the tragic drama, together, point to the same prevalent conclusion: that Shelley's intrinsically greatest work had been done in the poems most remotely connected with his reformatory zeal. The **Ode to the West Wind,** as we have observed, was the conscious invocation by the prophet of a voice of cosmic penetration, by which his message might be heralded; **The Cenci** was a conscious and dubious departure from the evangelism of his ideal doctrine, an uncharacteristic though masterful achievement in the type of objective drama. We view it as an interlude; many of his critics viewed it as evidence of ultimate emancipation from a philosophic obsession. The criticism which consistently deprecated this philosophy naturally acclaimed the unpreaching lyrics and the undoctrinated play.

Two general qualities of this criticism we may remark as constitutional in the English mind and temperament. The first was the persistent interest in the poet himself, in the man for his own sake, as contrasted with the art-for-art's-sake concern with the detached product of his pen. This manifested itself in the prolific series of biographies and personal memoirs which marked the course of his advancing reputation, and in the biographical matter — moralistic, psychological, and anecdotal — which constantly invaded the reviews. In Shelley's case this interest in the man was augmented by his eccentric nature and spectacular course of life, but in general it may be characterized as an ineluctable result of British taste and habit. English criticism has rarely, if ever, contented itself with the examination of the isolated product of national genius. At times this penchant for the personal and intimate knowledge of authors has issued in a creative appreciation impossible to that criticism which marks the text alone; at other times it has too nearly displaced the properly impersonal element.

The second of these autochthonous qualities, though far less frequently conspicu-

ous than the first, we have observed in the reticence of the British mind toward Shelley's Latin fervor. At least one critic has noted that Shelley was by temperament a poet of the South. Response to his undisciplined personal passion we have occasionally seen expressed in objections, often erroneous or unjust, to affectation and indecorous self-portraiture.

While there remains a perennial interest in the story of Shelley's life, and while this story quite properly continues to serve as introduction to the poetry, modern appreciation has come more and more to read Shelley's poetry as art, and to judge it by that standard, a part of the growth of which we have observed, which seeks the innate merit of its object, and applies criteria preconceived in terms of the literary type and the ends of self-sufficient art rather than in terms of personal knowledge of the author.

But because a knowledge of the historical aspects of this peculiarly enigmatic poet are of value for the understanding, if not for the final ranking, of his works, this study may have meaning for the modern appreciative mind. Recognizing the richest possible participation in the poetry of his unparalleled idealism as the ultimate and highest end of Shelley scholarship, we may seek legitimate approach to it by that knowledge of the man himself which biography conveys, by that understanding of temporal influence which history provides, and, lastly, by that varying record of past response which we find in the myriad aspects of its criticism. Though we accept no man's verdict as our own, and go armed with a clarifying sense of the integrity of unassisted art, we have a kinship with the readers of the past. By them we may be reminded of the multiplicity of the poet's meanings; and by observing their attitudes we may the better authenicate our own. In our day of **ars gratia artis** and the prevalent tendency to separate aesthetic from moral matter, we might do worse than to recall, with those who never could forget the fact, that here was a man who sought to turn the world upside down, and who allied a prophetic purpose with the beauty of creation. And in a time which thinks too often of him as weaver of the gossamers of fancy and custodian of cerulean similes, it is wholesome to remember that astonishing versatility of which a later editor justly wrote: "When anybody can point, in English literature, to a better modern tragedy than **The Cenci,** a predecessor of **Julian and Maddalo** in the same class of the poetic-familiar, a much choicer bit of intellectual grotesque than **Peter Bell the Third,** or translations superior to those from Homer, Euripides, and Goethe, let him do so; and then, not before, let him parrot the old cry that the ideal, whether in the way of invention and imagery, or of lyrical or rhetorical work (though even this would not be so very narrow a field), is the sum and substance of Shelley."

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